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ARDIS CLAVERDEN

BY

FRANK R. STOCKTON 1834-1902-

Author of "Rudder Grange," "The Lady or the Tiger," "The Late Mrs. Null," "The Casting Away of Mrs. Lecks and Mrs. Aleshine," "The Great War Syndicate," etc., etc.

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ARDIS CLAVERDEN.

CHAPTER I.

ON a pleasant morning, at the very end of summer, a man was sitting upon a fence by a roadside. This fence was in that country of low mountains and rolling land which lies along the eastern base of the Virginia Blue Ridge. The air was warm, but not too warm; and the man liked warm air. The sky was clear and blue without a cloud; and there was something in the heart of this man which made him love a sky like this. He wore a wide straw hat ragged at the edges; his shirt was coarse and indicated the color of the soil; and his trousers of brown cotton cloth were tucked into the tops of a pair of heavy, well-worn boots. He was a poor man, and had very little in this world except a wife and four daughters. But the air was warm and the sky was blue, and he was happy. And, to add to his happiness, there came to him the smell of grapes. The three things that he loved in this world, next best to his wife and daughters, were warm air, blue sky and the smell of grapes.

The perfume which so pleased this man did not come from grapes growing on their vines, for there was no vineyard nearer than his own very little one, and this year, the yield being a poor one, his grapes had all been eaten by

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his family. A gentle wind came down a long hill which lay above him, and down the road upon this hillside also came a wagon drawn by a pair of oxen. These, moving much more slowly than the gentle wind, leaned up against each other at such an angle that it seemed a wonder they could keep their feet, and held back the creaking wagon with their unwieldy yoke. By their side walked a negro man who assisted their descent by gently flapping their sides with his long whip, and by alternate commands and objurations, always addressing each animal by his proper name. In the wagon were six barrels filled with grapes, and it was the fragrance from these which came down the hill, and helped to make happy the heart of the man upon the fence.

"Hello, Shad!" cried the man upon the fence when the deliberately moving oxen had nearly reached him. "Is that the whole of the major's grape crop?"

"Whoa, Rob! Back, Rory!" cried the driver, mildly accentuating his commands by a tap across the forehead of the near ox. His team having willingly and suddenly come to a stand, the man walked round in front of them. "Yes, sah," he said, "dat's putty nigh de hull crap, 'cep'in' ob course dem wines what Miss Ardis has tied de red strings on. Ef her string hadn't give out I reckon dar wouldn't 'a' been more dan a one-hoss load fer de wine cellar."

"What does she tie red strings on for?" asked the other.

"Fo' eat'n' pupposes, sah. Miss Ardis, she's ob de 'pinion dat grapes was made to eat, an' not to be squzz up in a press; an' she jes' go through de wineyard an' tie her strings to eb'ry wine whar de grapes looked mos' good to eat; an' you bet, sah, dat when de pickers come to dem wines dey jes' pass 'em by as ef dey was no 'count

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sassafras bushes, an' go 'long lookin' fer wines wid no red strings on 'em."

The man on the fence smiled. "That was a very wise thing to do," he said. "When you eat grapes you know you have got a good thing, but when you make 'em into wine nobody knows what you're goin' to get."

"Dat's all right, sah," said the driver, stumping the butt of his whip into the road, "ef you've only got enough grapes to eat comf'ble."

"Oh, of course," said the other, "if a man has a big vineyard he might as well send what grapes he can't eat to the wine cellar, but what I mean is that he first ought to see that his family have all they want."

"Miss Ardis she 'tend to dat, sah," said Shad. "Dar's no use ob nobody else gibin' demselves no trouble 'bout dat." And he raised his whip in the air with the intention of starting his oxen.

"By the way, Shad," said the man on the fence, "is the major sendin' any of his extry grapes to the wine cellar this year?"

"Dem grapes is all on de wines yit; an' Miss Ardis didn't tie no red strings on 'em nuther. De major he come an' tas' 'em de fust minute dey was ripe, an' he shuck his head, an' he say: 'Dey ain't right yit!' an' he jes' leabe 'em dar fo' de birds, an' I s'pects dar'll be anudder year ob puttin' stuff inter dar roots an' cuttin' off dar tops, an' p'raps ob grubbin' 'em up an' beginnin' all ober agin."

"Very like," said the other, "but if the old gentleman ever expects to make that extry wine he's got to stick to his work. You can't do anything in this world if you don't stick to it."

"Dat's so," said Shad. And with a shout to Rob and a shout to Rory, and a flip of his whip over the sides of

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each of them, he again started his creaking wagon on its road to the town.

If an object in life of the man on the fence was to sit in a somewhat elevated position by a road along which people occasionally passed, he was true to his principles, for he stuck to the fence long after the grape wagon had disappeared round a turn in the road. He was American born, but of Italian descent. In the early part of this century a great landholder of the neighborhood had determined to undertake grape-growing on a large scale. He studied the subject in Italy and the south of France, and brought over several Italian vine-dressers in order that he might introduce into this country a knowledge of the proper culture of the grape. His vines had all died out long ago, but the vine-dressers took root in the soil, and if they did not flourish they multiplied.

All of their descendants, except the man on the fence, had departed from the immediate neighborhood, but this one had always lived here, and for many years had occupied a very small house on a corner of the large farm belonging to Major Claverden. He cultivated a few acres about this house, and by making himself useful in many ways to his neighbors he earned some money, and, in a manner, supported his wife and family. In regard to his own support he depended almost entirely upon philosophy, and it must be admitted that, as a rule, he fared much better than did his wife and daughters.

Warm air, a clear blue sky, and the smell of grapes could not come to him in every season, but his philosophy enabled him to remember them and to look forward to them even in the bleakest days of winter. There was never a comforting element in any circumstance and condition of his life which he was not able to extract. He had an ingenious mind; he was skilful with tools; he was

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a good sportsman; and was well versed in agriculture and vine-growing. Had he done as much as he knew how to do he might have been a moderately prosperous man, but had he worked hard and systematically he would not have been so happy, and thus, without having given the matter much consideration, he had grown into the habit of allowing his philosophy to make up the deficits occasioned by his disinclination to hard and systematic work.

His family name was Bonetti, but this had long since been corrupted by the people in the neighborhood into Bonnet. Only Major Claverden and his daughter Ardis called the man by his proper name. The old major remembered the grandfather Bonetti, and nothing would have induced him to descend to the use of a corruption of the Italian name.

The smell of grapes which had hung long in the summer air had almost faded away, when a lady came riding down the hill. She was mounted upon a tall mare; and in the pasture field, as close to the fence as it could get, there came a young colt, trotting, galloping, stopping, and whinnying to its mother, who occasionally turned her head and whinnied in answer. The lady, who was young and a good rider, came deliberately down the hill, and as she approached him the philosophizer got down from the fence and stood near the road.

"Good-morning, Miss Ardis," he said, lifting his hat.

"Good-morning Mr. Bonetti," said she, drawing up her steed. "How is your little girl?"

"Oh, she's nearly well, thank you," he answered. "I think it was grapes, and as the grapes are gone the child recovers. Nature is a fine physician, Miss Ardis."

"But if nature had given you more grapes," said she, "she would probably have taken away your child. In that case would you still wish her to practise in your family?"

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Bonetti laughed. "She has treated us very well so far," he said, "and she never sends any bills. So I think we shall, for the present at least, keep on employing her. And by the way, Miss Ardis, do you know what nature would say to you if she happened to be about just now and felt like giving advice?"

"I haven't the least idea," she answered.

"Well, it's my opinion she'd say that it wasn't a good thing to let that colt follow you along the edge of the field. It would have been safer to shut him up before you started."

"Oh, I didn't want to have him shut up such a fine day as this," she said, "and he can't follow me very far, anyway. When he gets down to the line fence he will have to stop."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Bonetti. "That line fence is pretty shacklin', and right much broken in some places; and if the colt doesn't get over and follow you to town, it's as like as not he'll break one of them thin legs of his tryin' to do it."

The handsome face of Miss Ardis grew thoughtful and her dark eyes turned toward the colt, who stood close to the other side of the fence trying to thrust his head between two of the bars.

"I believe you are right, Mr. Bonetti," she said. "I will go back and have the colt put up." And quickly turning her mare, she set off on a gallop up the hill.

The colt instantly followed on his side of the fence. Bounding along he kept neck and neck with his mother, his little feet sounding in quick thuds upon the short turf.

Bonetti stood in the road and looked admiringly after the young lady. "When she's got anything to do," he said to himself, "she goes right along and does it!" And then he walked to the fence and resumed his seat on the

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top rail. He had a little patch of potatoes which were ready to be dug, and there was a man who lived about a mile and a half up the road who owned a potato hook—a much better implement than an ordinary spade with which to dig potatoes—and as this man sometimes rode to town in the morning, Bonetti was waiting in the hope that he might see him and talk to him about borrowing his potato hook. If the man should not pass by, Bonetti would walk up to his house; but this, of course, would take time.

Not many minutes had elapsed before a man on horseback appeared at the top of the hill, but it was not the man for whom Bonetti was waiting. This was a tall gentleman, fairly well dressed, although his clothes were a little rusty, and he rode a bony horse of a muddy cream color, which hue was so peculiar that having been once seen, this horse could never be mistaken for any other. This gentleman was about forty years old, although his sober dress and the weather-beaten appearance of his features made him look much older. He wore no beard, but the razor could not remove the strong bluish tinge which covered his cheeks and chin, and this also helped to make him look older than he was.

When Bonetti perceived the new-comer his eyes sparkled. He would rather see Dr. Lester than twenty other men each carrying a potato hook which he did not intend to use that day. The new-comer brought no suggestion to Bonetti of any one of the three things which he loved next to his wife and daughters, but he and the doctor were both philosophizers and great friends.

"Morning, Bonnet," said the doctor, stopping his horse. "Can you tell me what sent Miss Ardis back home in such a hurry? She just now passed me in a mad gallop and had scarcely time to give me a word."

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"She has gone back," said the other, "because the colt was following her. She is goin' to have him shut up."

"Confound the colt!" said Dr. Lester. And throwing his long right leg over the back of the horse, he dismounted, and still holding the bridle in his hand, approached the fence and took a seat on the top rail near Bonetti.

"If you're goin' to do any confoundin'," said the latter, "you'd better confound me, for I put it into her head to have the colt shut up. He's too good a colt to run any risks with."

"Your advice may have been all very well for the colt," said the doctor, "but it was bad for me. When I was more than half a mile away from the major's gate I saw Miss Ardis ride out of it, and I knew by the little yellow mail-bag which she wore that she was going to town. I hurried up, and I am quite sure I should have overtaken her and have ridden into town with her, and perhaps come back with her, if she had not changed her mind and gone charging home."

"You've good eyes, doctor," said Bonetti, "to see that little bag so far."

"I have very good eyes for some things," the other replied, "and I must say I am disappointed."

"What is the good of that?" asked Bonetti. "Just stay here and make yourself comfortable till she comes back, and when we see her at the top of the hill you can get on your horse and be ready to go along with her just as you would have done before."

The doctor settled himself more easily upon the fence. "Yes," he said, "I suppose the best thing to do is to wait."

Bonetti looked around at him with a little twinkle in his eye. "How long do you expect to wait, doctor?" he

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asked. "I don't mean here by the road, but before putting the question to her."

The doctor straightened himself up so suddenly that he jerked the cream-colored horse's head from the grass on which he was browsing. "Put the question to her!" he exclaimed. "Do you suppose I could ever be such an inordinate fool as to put the question to Miss Ardis Claverden?"

"It strikes me," said Bonetti, "that a man feelin' as you do in the direction of any woman would be bound to put the question to her if he had a chance."

The doctor remained for a moment sitting up straight, and then he settled down again to his former easy position, his body leaning forward, his elbows on his knees, and his heels on the second rail below him. "Bonnet," said he, "I hoped you had a better opinion of me than that. Who am I to offer to marry a girl like Miss Ardis? What have I got to give her? What sort of a place have I to take her to? Do you suppose she could live in one room as I do, and be content with the meals that old Aunt Hetty cooks for me? I tell you, Bonnet, that if a man like me, pretty well on in years, without good looks, without any money to speak of, and who does nothing to earn a livelihood for himself or anybody else, were to propose to marry a young lady who has lived the life that Miss Ardis has always lived, he would commit what I call an impertinent crime."

Bonetti reflected for a moment. "I reckon you're right, doctor," he said. "The points of the case seem to be on your side. I have heard people say that you never practised on any patient for love or money. Is that so?"

"That is so, Bonnet," replied the doctor. "I am sorry for it, but it cannot be helped now. It is nearly twenty years since I came back from the University and put my

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diploma up on a top shelf in my room. I did not feel myself ready to take people's lives in my hands, and if they sent for me for little things they might send for me for great ones; and the more I studied and looked into the matter the stronger I felt that there was no reason why I should put myself forward as a practising physician in a country where there were already plenty of good doctors. I used to think that the time would come when I would feel ready to make a start in my profession, but it has not come yet, and it never will. If I had not had a little income, enough for one man to scratch along with, I should have been obliged to take some risks like other beginners; but that was not the case, and I did not take the risks."

"I have noticed," said Bonetti, "that you never so much as state your notions about a cold or a toothache. There isn't an old woman in the county who wouldn't do that!"

"You are right," said the doctor, "but people are not bound to take advice from an old woman, and they might feel bound to take it from a man who had been graduated from a college of medicine."

Bonetti smiled. "I reckon, doctor," he said, "that you'd been as good as any of 'em if you had only thought so. But, as you say, that's neither here nor there at the present time. But it seems a little hard that a man of good family who reads as much as you do and who knows as much as you do, and who does as many different kinds of things as you do by day and by night, should have to come to look on himself as you look on yourself."

"It is hard, Bonnet," replied the other, "but it can't be helped."

"Doctor," said Bonetti, "suppose Miss Ardis was to come to you and say that she had seen what was in your

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mind and knew why you didn't speak it out, and considerin' the circumstances of the case she'd do the speakin' herself, and say squarely that she was ready to marry you just as you stood: what would you do then?"

Doctor Lester gazed steadfastly at the grass beneath him. "In that case," he said, "we will suppose it is in the morning she makes that statement to me."

"All right," said Bonetti, "we will let it be in the mornin'."

"Very well," answered the doctor. "I should just simply let myself be the happiest man on earth that morning, and in the evening I'd go and hang myself. I have thought of this thing myself, Bonnet, and that is what I should do. If I waited longer than that evening I might not be able to hang myself."

"I don't know but you are right, doctor," said Bonetti. "I reckon that hangin' on the same day would be the best thing you could do."

The doctor made no answer but continued to gaze at the grass.

"But with things in that way, doctor," said Bonetti, after a little pause, "do you intend to keep on thinkin' of Miss Ardis as you do think of her?"

"Keep on!" exclaimed the doctor. "I intend to keep on until the end of time—at least to the end of my time. I would not say this to everybody, Bonnet, but you and I have talked over this matter so often before, that I don't mind letting you see just how the case stands."

"It strikes me," said Bonetti, "that it would be wearin' on a man to keep on with a thing like this."

"It would be a good deal more wearing on me to stop it," said the doctor.

"Of course it wouldn't do to stop it too suddenly," said the philosophizing Bonetti. "It is like smokin' or any

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other habit, and considerin' you have had it ever since she was not more than a child, the breakin' of it off is a thing to be careful about." And turning his eyes suddenly toward the top of the hill, he exclaimed: "And here she comes!" But almost instantly added: "No, she doesn't, either!"

Dr. Lester had let down his long legs preparatory to slipping from the fence, but now he drew them back again and looked up the hill. It was not Miss Ardis who was coming; it was a negro boy on horseback. The two men watched him as he approached.

"It's the major's boy Tom," said Bonetti.

The doctor said nothing, but looked steadfastly at the boy, and when he came near enough Bonetti called out: "O Tom! Where you goin'?"

The boy, who carried by a strap over his shoulder, not a neat, yellow leathern bag, but a large and well-worn brown satchel, replied: "I's gwine to de pos'-office."

"I thought Miss Ardis was goin'," said Bonetti.

"Yes, sah," replied Tom, "she 'tentioned to go, but cump'ny done come an' I's gwine." And with that he rode on.

Dr. Lester got down from the fence, put the bridle over the neck of his horse, and standing on one long leg, put the foot of the other into the stirrup and mounted.

"Goin' to town?" asked Bonetti.

"No," said the doctor, "I have no call to go to town. I reckon I will stop on my way back and have a chat with Major Claverden. That isn't what I expected, Bonnet, but it is better than nothing. Good-morning." And turning his cream-colored steed, he began the ascent of the hill.

"I almost wish," said Bonetti to himself, "that I had let that colt break its legs. And yet, what would have been the good of it? If the doctor ever gets an extra

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fair chance to speak his mind to Miss Ardis, it's ten to one he'll forget himself and do it. And if that ever happens, good-by to Doctor Lester! Whether she takes him or turns him off it will be all the same. If he doesn't hang for her sake, he'll do it for his own."

And then Bonetti, having a superstition that it is unlucky to wait by a roadside until five persons pass in the same direction, and being oppressed therefore with the fear that should the owner of the potato hook now appear there might be some reason why that instrument could not be borrowed, got down from the fence and went home.

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CHAPTER II.

BALD HILL, the estate of Major Claverden, was a very good one, although, as any one in the neighborhood would tell you, it was not what it used to be before the war. But while this may be true in many respects, the owner of Bald Hill, a man of sixty-five years and in very good physical condition, was enabled to live in comfort, and to a certain degree in the style to which the Claverden family had been accustomed. His spacious house was of brick, built in the somewhat severe fashion of many of the old Virginia mansions. A fine lawn shaded by large trees, most of which had been planted by the major's father, stretched before the house, and the character of the farm, which included some six hundred acres, was not to be judged from the stony hill, a quarter of a mile from the house, which gave its name to the estate. Much of the land was fairly good, and enough of the arable portion of it was under cultivation to satisfy its owner's present needs.

There were horses for riding, driving, and farm purposes, all of them good ones and raised on the place; there were vehicles of various sorts in the carriage house; the negro driver wore a very good black coat and a high silk hat; there was always plenty to eat and to drink; the woodlands afforded abundance of oak and hickory logs for winter fires; and the major's only child, Ardis, was as well dressed as any young lady in her position need wish to be.

Mrs. Claverden had died when her daughter was very

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young, and the child had been given the family name of her mother. "I wish my daughter to always remember," the major would say, "that she is an Ardis as well as a Claverden." And if he happened to have an appreciative listener he would probably continue: "A remarkable thing about these two families is this: I never heard a Claverden say that he was better than an Ardis, or an Ardis that he was better than a Claverden, and considering the high position of the two families this is exceptional. I feel warranted in saying it is truly exceptional! Now, while I desire that my daughter shall never feel that she is better than her neighbors, I hope that she may so live that all who know her shall say that she is better than any one else, excepting, of course, the speaker and his family. I may add that I see no reason to doubt that this will be the case."

The major's admiration for his daughter was well grounded, for everybody admired her, even those who criticised her independence of thought and action. In high regard and esteem of her her father stood pre-eminent. In his mind she was the reason why good things should be and bad things should not be; and, furthermore, he was often of the opinion that she was the reason why good things were and bad things were not.

Ardis did what she pleased because her father felt assured that she always pleased to do what was right. The conviction had not come to him, although it had come to other people, that he often thought things were right because she pleased to do them. But, although he was thus willing to defer to his daughter's judgment in matters which concerned herself, or himself in affairs over which he did not choose to exercise jurisdiction, Major Claverden was a man of strong opinions. In a great degree the conduct of affairs at Bald Hill was placed in the hands

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of Ardis, and the fact that she did not endeavor to interfere with those affairs over which her father chose to retain control showed that his confidence in her judgment was not entirely misplaced.

They were very happy, father and daughter; each independent of the other, and yet each dependent on the other for that independence. Ardis was beautiful, and this she owed to both her parents; she had talents of various kinds, and these she inherited from both father and mother; and she had an earnest desire to do what was right, and this also came to her from both sides of the family. That she did not always know what was right arose from the fact that a mother's family name does not take the place of a mother's guidance.

As a child Ardis had been well taken care of by her nurses and relatives; as a girl she had had all the advantages that teachers and schools could give her; but as a woman there was no one on whom she depended for counsel or direction. Should she lay a subject before her father, it nearly always happened that she had a preconceived notion in regard to it, and on the carrying out of that notion the major would insist—sometimes, if he thought necessary, with a little severity. It had been suggested by relatives that it would be a very good thing if Ardis could have some pleasant middle-aged lady to live with her and to give her a certain amount of companionship as well as assistance in household affairs; at anything more than this no relative would have thought of hinting. But Major Claverden vigorously declared that he wanted no old woman meddling with his domestic affairs, and Ardis quietly but firmly asserted that so long as she had the services of Caroline, a superior negro servant who for many years had acted as housekeeper, and those of Henry, the veteran dining-room servant, she

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needed no assistance in household duties; and as for companionship, she would have to think a long time before she could fix her mind upon any person whom she would be willing to take into the house as a constant companion. Thus it was that the father and daughter made up the family, and were very happy.

As has been said, Major Claverden had other strong opinions besides those in regard to his daughter. Among these were ideas—some of which had proved to be very good ones—about agriculture and grape-growing. For many years he had had a theory that no reason existed why as good wine should not be produced from grapes grown on his estate as from those picked from vines on the banks of the Rhine. He had journeyed up and down the Rhine, had visited the vineyards, carefully examined and studied the soil, the vines, the exposures, and the methods of culture, and was not able to perceive why a grape grown in Virginia should not possess all the superior wine-making properties of a grape grown in Germany. To the perfection of such a grape he had devoted certain suitable slopes of his farm and a great deal of his thought and attention. So far he had produced no grapes which satisfied him, but he had an earnest belief that eventually he should do so.

Ever since she could remember Ardis had heard of the "wine of Bald Hill," that wonderful liquor which was to rival the wine of Johannisberg. Into a belief in the realization of her father's dreams in regard to this wine Ardis had, in a manner, been educated. This faith remained unquestioned, for she always believed in her father.

When Dr. Lester reached Bald Hill he found the company whose arrival there had been the cause of his losing the ride to town with Miss Ardis, was made up of Mr. and Mrs. Dalrymple and their grown daughter. Mr. Dal-

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rymple was a retired business man from the Northwest who had recently bought a farm in the neighborhood, intending to devote himself to rural pursuits. Major Claverden and his daughter had called on the family, and this was the return visit.

The ladies were on the back piazza, a wide and commodious structure which had recently been built for the pleasure of Ardis, and under her direction. She greatly liked this cool, partly vine-embowered piazza; and here, when her father and Mr. Dalrymple began to talk of agricultural matters, she had taken Mrs. Dalrymple and her daughter. To this piazza Dr. Lester greatly desired to repair. He did not know the Dalrymples, but Miss Ardis was there, and where she was there would he be, no matter who else might be present. But Major Claverden was just starting out to show Mr. Dalrymple his vineyard, and he invited the doctor to accompany them.

The latter had heard over and over again the fullest accounts of what the Bald Hill vines were intended to be, but he was a gentleman, and a gentleman had asked him to join another gentleman in observations in which it was to be expected that gentlemen would take an interest, and he could think of no reason which it would be proper to express why he should excuse himself and go and sit with three ladies. If he had not been conscious of a special reason for desiring to be with the ladies, he might have thought of some excuse which would have answered his purpose very well.

Therefore the doctor trudged by the side of the major toward the southern slope of Bald Hill. All the way Major Claverden talked about what he had done and what he intended to do in regard to the ultimate production of the wine of Bald Hill. Mr. Dalrymple interjected a good many remarks, chiefly in the form of questions,

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while the doctor wondered why it should happen that these people should determine to come to Bald Hill on a morning when otherwise he might have had the inestimable privilege of riding to town with Miss Ardis. Any other morning would have suited the Dalrymples as well as this; but when would such a happy chance again present itself to him? He made a promise to himself that the next time such an opportunity occurred to him and he was not prevented from taking advantage of it, he would give one dollar to the poor. The doctor could not afford such charity, but he made the promise in good faith and would stand by it.

"Now, sir," said the major to Mr. Dalrymple, "you see before you a hill which is precisely similar in all its conditions to those slopes from which the most famous Rhenish wines are produced. Like many of the vineyards on the banks of the Rhine, this hill was originally totally unfitted for the culture of the grape. It had nothing in its favor but the climate of the region and its exposure. As the hills on the Rhine were terraced, I terraced this one; a suitable soil was deposited by manual labor upon their terraces, so I deposited soil on these. There is no difference, sir, between the earth in which the Rhenish vines grow and this earth. Years of observation, analysis, and patient labor have enabled me to feel entirely certain upon this point. The vines on this slope are the same as those which grow in the famous Johannisberg vineyard. To have them so, sir, cost me more money, time and thought than you can or are likely to imagine."

"I do not see," said Mr. Dalrymple, "how that sort of thing could be done at all! The Johannisberg people would not allow cuttings to be taken from their estate, and I cannot imagine how any one could imitate their vines!".

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The major smiled slightly. "Of course it would take a good deal of study to make one able to comprehend that branch of the subject. But, as I was saying, sir, you see before you a vineyard with all the characteristics and qualities of a Rhenish vineyard. To be sure our river, the Tardiana, which flows here at the foot of the hills, is not so wide as the Rhine where it passes the Johannisberg Schloss, but what influence, sir, can the width of the river have upon the flavor of a grape?"

"That may be one of the influences which exist," said Mr. Dalrymple, "but which we cannot perceive."

"I may say further," said the major, "that where the Rhine is wider the grapes are not so good. Now, sir, in this portion of my vineyard is everything favorable to the production of the very best grape which can be found in the Johannisberg vineyard; the only difference being that one is called Bald Hill and the other John's Mountain. And if my life and health hold out a few years longer, I think I shall make it evident that as good wine can be produced on the one as on the other."

"You cannot imitate nature," said Mr. Dalrymple. "What she does for the grapes on the Rhine she is not going to do here—at least I do not think so."

Dr. Lester had not yet spoken, but Mr. Dalrymple's tone drew his mind from the contemplation of his morning's disappointment. "You forget, sir," he said, "that the most valuable grapes, as well as the most valuable vegetable products of other sorts, are the result of man's work and thought. They are improvements upon nature. And no good reason has yet been offered why Major Claverden should not grow as good wine grapes from the vines which he, not nature, placed on this hill as are grown on the vines which the Germans, not nature, placed on the hills of the Rhine."

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Mr. Dalrymple glanced at the speaker, who he thought must be a very poor kind of doctor if he had nothing to do but to wander about in this idle way. "You might as well try," he said, "to manufacture an Apollinaris spring in one of the cracks or gullies in your hills. If you could do that, now, it would be worth something."

"The rest of my vineyard, sir," said the major, paying no attention to this remark, "is planted with the varieties of grape generally grown in this country."

And then, as the party walked back to the house, the major talked of other things than grapes. His manner was very courteous during the rest of the Dalrymple call, but in his mind was a fixed determination that he would never have anything more to do with the man Dalrymple. If his daughter liked the ladies and chose to visit them she could do so, but he would never go near the house. If he met the man he would treat him politely, and that would be all.

The callers soon departed, but Dr. Lester remained to dinner, which, according to the time-honored custom of the country, was served somewhere between two and three o'clock.

The two gentlemen had just finished their after-dinner pipes when Ardis appeared. She wore a broad straw hat, and in one hand she carried a basket.

"I am going to pick some grapes," she said, "from the vines I reserve for family use. Don't you want to come and help me, doctor?"

Gates of Heaven! He arose with a spring.

Dr. Lester staid to supper; and he spent the evening up to ten o'clock playing whist with Miss Ardis, her father, and a dummy. When the young lady had retired he passed the rest of the evening talking politics with the major, with the accompaniment of pipes and some apple

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toddy which his host mixed with much skill and deliberation.

Dr. Lester staid all night at Bald Hill, as was frequently his custom; but he arose very early in the morning and rode home on his cream-colored horse. "There is no reason," he said to himself, "why a man who has been as hopelessly happy as I was yesterday should expose himself to the possible frosts of breakfast-time."

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CHAPTER III.

AMONG the several gentlemen whose admiration of Miss Ardis Claverden had deepened into an earnest affection was Mr. Roger Dunworth, who owned a large farm about five miles from Bald Hill. He was a good-looking young man, a little over-tall perhaps, a hard worker and an able manager. He lived a bachelor life in a large house; and his estate, which was partly inherited and partly bought from other heirs, was productive and kept in admirable condition. His family consisted of himself and three young Englishmen who were his pupils in husbandry. This was a section of country much affected by English settlers, many of whom were young men, often of good family, who saw, or thought they saw, in Virginia, opportunities of becoming land owners and prosperous farmers which were totally denied to them in their own country. It was their custom to make a more or less systematic study of Virginia fashions of country life and agriculture; and with this object in view they would enter as pupils into the families of such farmers as were willing to take them; and thus the English pupil had become a not uncommon element in the households in that part of the country.

Although young Dunworth worked hard, superintended his negro hands, and conscientiously endeavored to keep his pupils in paths which should be profitable both to them and to himself, he found time for rural recreations. He went out with his gun and dogs in the hunting season, and

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he liked at any season to make occasional visits to his neighbors. But his most frequent visits were made to Bald Hill.

It was now two years—ever since Ardis had finished her school life and had taken her place as director of her father's household—that Roger Dunworth had been seriously in love with her. He had never mentioned this fact to any one, although everybody was well aware of it. Ardis perfectly understood the state of affairs, but she pursued the tenor of her way—sometimes even and sometimes otherwise—without regard to such condition, and treated the matter so coolly, indeed, that many persons thought the affair was settled, and that the young couple only awaited a suitable opportunity to make a public announcement of it.

Roger Dunworth was a sharp-seeing person, and he knew perfectly well that other men loved Ardis, but among these he never numbered Dr. Lester.

The latter, on his part, was as much inclined to be reticent in a matter of this sort as was Dunworth; but as he never expected to speak to Ardis on the subject, it was a positive relief to him to speak to some one, and to no one could he open his mind with greater confidence and satisfaction than to Bonetti. This brother philosophizer was interested in many things which interested the doctor. Like the doctor he was thoroughly versed in wood-craft; understood the habits of animals, birds, snakes, and insects; could carve wood; and had a cunning hand in making ingenious mechanical contrivances. The doctor was a well-educated and well-read man, while Bonetti had spent but a small portion of his boyhood in school, but the latter had a quick and bright intelligence, and in the winter-time read with interest and advantage the books which his friends lent him. The two belonged to very

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different classes of society, but the sympathy between them prevented either of them from paying any attention to this.

Dunworth considered Bonetti the best sportsman in the county, and was often glad to have his opinion in regard to vines, horses, or the training of a dog; but beyond this he merely looked upon him as a good-natured but lazy fellow who ought to do at least as much for his wife and daughters as the latter did for him. Had the two lived nearer to each other, it is probable that frequently Dunworth would have lent Bonetti potato hooks and other tools, but at the same time he would have worried the latter by offering him work when he was more agreeably occupied.

One Saturday morning Dunworth was riding toward the town, to which centre of the county's interests his business occasionally took him. Being alone, it was natural that his thoughts should be upon Ardis, and he was thinking hard. His ideas were not arranged systematically, but they had a general tendency, and that was toward a determination to speak plainly to Ardis on the first favorable opportunity. He had not spoken so far because he believed that the proper time had not arrived. And he was entirely right. He could see very well that although Ardis might like him and, in a measure, be fond of him, she had not yet come to like him so well that she would be willing to accept his love to the exclusion of that of every other man. But now he thought he ought to speak. In the first place, his love for Ardis had greatly grown of late, and was much more difficult to restrain than it had been; and in the second place, there was every reason to believe that the love of other people for the girl had also increased and might be difficult to restrain. As she had grown physically and mentally, she had grown

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more and more lovely, and, therefore, more likely to be loved.

There was no one in the neighborhood whom Dunworth looked upon as a rival. His fears in this respect concerned men whom he had never seen, but of whom he had heard. These Ardis had met in Washington and New York, in which cities she had spent portions of the past two winters. He had heard of these men from Ardis herself, and knew that she had a good opinion of them, but that she would be likely to meet them again, or that any one of them would propose to her, he had no particular reason for believing. He argued, however, upon the general principle that if any one of these pleasant gentlemen should meet her again he would be very likely to offer himself to her. In view of such a contingency Dunworth had now determined to offer himself before Ardis again left Bald Hill. There was no need for hurry about it, for winter was still distant, but also there was no reason for delay if a good opportunity should offer itself. With his mind fully made up on these points he entered the town.

Bolton was only a country town, and not a very large one; but it was the county-seat, and therefore a place of general resort to the people of the surrounding country. Its principal street was wide and well supplied with shops of various kinds and grades, from a large and imposing pharmacy to a little one-story house in which a negro cobbler had his shop. On one side of this street opened a wide, well-paved place, generally known as "the square," although it was oblong. Here were the bank, the post-office, and various places of business, and at its farthest end was the railroad station. On the other side of the street, a little higher up, was another open space not as large as this, and in it stood the court house. The

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front yard of this building, shaded by trees and moderately provided with grass, was the only spot in Bolton which in any way resembled a public green.

On the monthly court days and on Saturdays the town was a busy place. Country people came in from all parts; on horseback, in spring wagons, in wagons without springs, and sometimes might be seen a negro in a creaking little cart drawn by one mournful and diminutive ox. Great wagons with their teams moved up and down or stood in the middle of the street, and whenever a driver of a vehicle wished to speak to a neighbor he stopped wherever he happened to be, and the drivers of other vehicles meandered patiently around him. There were blacks and whites, with all the intermediate shades, and everybody seemed to be acquainted with everybody else.

It was about noon, and Roger Dunworth, having finished his business in the town, was untying his horse from the front of the post-office, when a dog-cart driven very rapidly came diagonally across the square, and was pulled up, with a great jerk, in front of the post-office. Roger's horse started at the clatter of the wheels, and his master looked up and saluted the occupant of the dog-cart. This vehicle was very high, with enormous wheels, and its driver looked as if he were perched upon the box of a stage-coach. The horse was of moderate size, with light buff harness and a short cropped tail, and he suggested the idea that he must have a hard time in keeping out of the way of the overhanging vehicle behind him.

No one could for a moment doubt that the young man in the dog-cart was an Englishman. He was small of stature, with a ruddy, beardless, boyish face, and was dressed in a suit of light corduroy which, considering the season, appeared heavy and warm. On his head he wore one of those helmet-like structures of linen and cork gen-

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erally preferred in summer by Englishmen to the straw hats of America, and his countenance and manner indicated high health and a constant desire to be doing something with energy.

"How do you do, Mr. Dunworth?" he cried, springing down from the dog-cart and taking Roger's hand with a clap and a grip which would have served better to take a culprit by the collar than a friend by the hand.

This individual was Tom Prouter, a young Englishman who was neither a pupil of husbandry nor an intending settler in this country. He was of a good English family, with a moderate income and fair expectations. He had come to Virginia because he had friends there, and because he had learned he could live there and enjoy himself for a great deal less money than if he remained in England. He made his home at the house of one of his friends a few miles from Bolton. He kept his horse, his dog-cart, his setter, and his gun; and was as happy a young fellow as could be found in the State. He was of a very sociable disposition, and was on a friendly footing with many of the native families of the neighborhood as well as with those of his compatriots.

"Going home, Mr. Dunworth?" said Prouter.

"Yes."

"Good! I am going your way—at least part of it. I am going to stop at Bald Hill, and I hope the old major will ask me to stay to dinner."

"I am going to stop there myself," said Roger.

"Really?" cried Prouter. "That's tip-top! Wait a minute until I post these letters and see if there is anything for the family. And then I have got to go to two or three shops and get the things that they have given me a list of, and after that I have nothing to do in town but to go to the railway station and get a time-table for

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old Miss Airpenny, who is going off by train somewhere to-morrow. I shall be with you in three minutes."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Roger with a laugh. "It will be half an hour or more before you are ready to leave town, and I can't wait here all that time. I shall ride on, and perhaps you can catch up with me."

"I'll do it!" cried Prouter. "I'll be with you before you have gone a mile!" And he dashed into the post-office.

Dunworth mounted and rode away. He had not positively intended to stop at Bald Hill, although he had been thinking about it; but Prouter's statement of his intention instantly determined him to do the same thing. Since his thoughtful ride that morning his purposes regarding Ardis Claverden had become much more definite. He was not jealous of Prouter, who knew Ardis but slightly, nor was he afraid of him, although a young Englishman who would one day come into a good property and position, should not be looked upon with indifference as a rival if he chose to make himself such. But now that Ardis concerned Roger more than ever before, he felt that her male friends concerned him more than ever; and if Prouter intended to stop at Bald Hill he would stop too. He liked the young Englishman and would have been glad to have his company on the road had he been mounted, but Dunworth had no desire to ride before, after, or by the side of a rattling dog-cart.

He reached Bald Hill before Prouter left the town. Ardis was not visible, but the major received his visitor with great cordiality. Dunworth's horse was taken away and the two men ensconced themselves in comfortable chairs on the porch. They had duly discussed the country and the crops, and Roger was beginning to think that Ardis was a long time in making her appearance, when

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Prouter whirled upon the scene, his face in a glow and his horse streaked with foam. Throwing the reins on the back of his panting beast he sprang to the ground and was about to lead the animal to a hitching-post, when Major Claverden called to him that a man would take his horse and advanced to greet him.

Prouter instantly turned, and with five steps and a jump crossed the grass-plat in front of the house, and reached the bottom of the porch steps by the time the major was at the top. After the customary salutations he turned around uneasily toward the negro who was leading away his horse. He felt it was necessary for him to say something. If this was to be merely a morning call there was no need that the horse should be taken to the stables, and he could not assume that the case was otherwise.

"Do not be disturbed about your horse," said the major, smiling. "My man will not water him before he is cooled off, and you will stay to dinner with us."

"Thank you very much," said the relieved Prouter. "I shall be glad to do it. I was only thinking if it rained some of those parcels in the cart would get wet; two or three of them are sugar, I think."

"Have no fear about them," said the major. "Your dog-cart shall be put under cover."

And then, fearing that he had made an unnecessary imputation, Prouter turned a little redder than usual; and declaring that it made no difference anyway, took his seat on a bench, at the end of the porch. Now the interrupted conversation was resumed, and although Prouter took very little part in it, he leaned forward on his bench with his elbows on his knees and listened with an earnest energy which would have encouraged the poorest talker. Very soon Ardis made her appearance, looking lovely in a white dress with a cluster of old-fashioned garden flowers

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in her belt. She gave a gracious welcome to each of the two young men, and as Roger took her hand some agreeable thoughts flashed into his mind. "She knew I was here. She was a long time coming down. She is beautifully dressed." These were thoughts very encouraging to a lover.

The young Englishman greatly enjoyed his dinner. "What I like about a meal like this," he exclaimed with enthusiasm, "is that it is out-and-out American! Now, I don't mean to say that I do not like an out-and-out English dinner, better than any other, which I do, and expect to have them all my life when I settle down; but the people at Loch Levin give me meals——"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Major Claverden. "Is that the present name of Mr. Quantrill's place? It was always called Black Gum Bottom."

"They didn't like that," said Prouter, "and wanted to give it an Old Country name, and they have a bit of a mill-pond near by. As I was saying, their meals are about half-naturalized, and are neither one thing nor the other. Now, I like everything about me to be out-and-out, one thing or the other!"

"And yet," said the major, "judicious admixtures are very valuable. From these have come the first results of civilization."

"That is very true," said Prouter, "where it concerns race-horses or grapes, but I don't think it works with dinners. That sort of thing I like out-and-out, like this one."

After dinner Major Claverden invited his guests to smoke with him on the porch. This invitation was accepted with alacrity by Prouter, and with some hesitation by Dunworth, who waited a little to see what Ardis was going to do. But as she stepped aside to speak to a

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servant he followed the other gentlemen, hoping that Ardis would join the party, for he knew she was not afraid of the smell of good tobacco in open air.

Prouter was soon in a state of great delight over the major's manner of lighting his pipe. A negro boy brought on a shovel some glowing embers from the kitchen fire, and with a pair of small tongs made for the purpose Major Claverden took up one of these and applied it to his well-filled pipe-bowl.

"Yes, sir," said he, in reply to an exclamation from the young Englishman, "I never light my pipe with a match or piece of burning paper. I always use a coal of fire, as did my father before me. Anything else would destroy the flavor of the tobacco."

"By George! that's a splendid idea!" cried Prouter as he took the tongs and lighted his pipe with a coal. "When I settle down I am going to have a little chap like that to bring me coals of fire for my pipe."

"But in England you ought to be out-and-out English," said Dunworth.

"When I smoke Virginia tobacco," said Prouter, "I am going to be out-and-out Virginian."

As he smoked, Roger's eyes, as well as his thoughts, wandered from his company. If he saw Ardis in the garden, or anywhere about the grounds, he intended to join her. The major had just finished his pipe when that young lady appeared in the doorway. She had changed her dress and now wore a dark gown with a long, white apron with a front attachment which came up nearly to her throat. This garment was decorated with spots and lines of various colors which did not appear to have been imprinted thereon in any regular design.

"Gentlemen," said she, "I want a model."

"In that case," said the major, knocking the ashes from

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his pipe and rising, "I will give way to these younger men. I have done my full duty as a model, and will go and look after my people, who are by no means models, I assure you."

Dunworth and Prouter instantly offered their services to Miss Claverden, and accompanied her to her studio. In temperament Ardis Claverden was essentially artistic. Her father had gratified her inclinations in this direction, and she had had a more thorough instruction in drawing and painting than is generally received by girls who are not expected to become professional artists. She was very much in earnest about her art work, and if she did not actually expect to make it her life-work, she had very strong leanings that way. An artistic career appeared to her delightful. She would have liked to study in Paris, to have an atelier at the top of a tall old house, to mingle with the students in the École des Beaux-Arts, to copy in the galleries of the Louvre and Luxembourg, and after a year or two of all that, to wander through Italy and Germany, grafting her own art imaginings on those of the masters. Her disposition was as much inclined toward the "out-and-out" as was Prouter's.

In disposition Ardis was conscientiously independent. She believed it to be her duty to judge for herself what was right and what was wrong; and although in some cases her decisions came in a flash, in others they were slow and carefully weighed. She had once thought that it might be well for her to study medicine and practice among poor people; and she had taken Dr. Lester into her confidence on this subject. His strong prejudices against women doctors, imbibed when he was a student, and his thorough knowledge of the vicissitudes and hardships of a physician's life, derived from an intimate acquaintance with all the doctors in the county, enabled

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him to persuade her that a medical career was entirely unsuited to her; and this project was thought of no more. To persuade her that an artistic career was unsuited to her would have been a much more difficult task, inclination being such a powerful ally of duty.

Ardis's studio was a large building which had once been a barn, but she had totally changed its original character and made it entirely suitable for her purposes. A tall window was put into the northern gable, and the large room was fitted up, not only conveniently but elegantly. Her disposition turned her toward elegance as well as toward art.

"Now, gentlemen," said Ardis when they had entered the studio, "which of you will be my model?"

Dunworth was about to ask for what she wanted a model, when Prouter declared that he would pose for her in any position she desired. "If my face is not venerable enough," he said, "we can doctor it up and make it so."

"I don't care anything about a face," Ardis answered. "I want a back. I desire to sketch a retreating figure."

"Very good," said Prouter, "I can retreat. Shall I retreat into a corner? Do you want me to put on any of these costumes?"

"Your present attire will suit me very well," said Ardis. "And you need not be in such a hurry to retreat. That is not like a true Englishman. Let me show you what I am doing." And she led them to a canvas on an easel. "You see," she said, "it is a backwoodsman just about to shoot at a flying enemy. Father stood for the figure in the foreground. He is a good sportsman and knew just how to stand and raise his rifle. And now I want the man running away in the middle distance."

"I'll suit him exactly," said Prouter, "for I am shorter

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than Mr. Dunworth and will not have to go so far to give the right perspective."

Ardis laughed. "You will answer admirably," she said, "and I will tell you what you must do."

She opened a door from which a path led to a little grove at a short distance, and Dunworth placed the easel near it, replacing the canvas by a drawing-board.

"Now," said she to Prouter, "you must run down that path until I call to you to stop, and then you must try to maintain the position you happen to be in, as nearly as you can."

When Ardis had taken her seat and was ready to sketch, she gave her impatient model permission to start. Instantly his heavy shoes beat rapidly on the path, and if she had not quickly called to him he would have been out of sight among the trees.

Prouter stopped at the word, one foot in the air, and his body well forward.

"Oh, you can't stand that way!" cried Ardis.

"Yes, I can!" shouted the model without turning his head. "You can go on and put me into your picture."

"His arms are too close to his side," remarked Ardis to Dunworth.

"Like a professional runner," replied the latter.

Thereupon Ardis called to her model to extend his arms somewhat as if he were flying in terror, but before he could arrange himself to suit her, down came his upraised foot, and he stood upright.

"Can't keep it up," he said, turning round. "I didn't know how hard it was. Shall have to try it over again, and stop on a better balance."

Prouter now came back and prepared for a second run. Ardis instructed him to stop at the proper distance, with one foot and the toes of the other on the ground, as the

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extended leg could easily be raised when she transferred the sketch to the canvas.

After a few suggestions from Ardis, Prouter's new position was pronounced a success, and she began to draw.

"Don't hurry yourself!" the model shouted. "I am good for all day now!"

Ardis was not a rapid sketcher, and worked carefully and thoughtfully. Dunworth took a seat near her, watching her, but not her work; and as he looked upon her his heart drew nearer and nearer to this handsome girl, whose large dark eyes gazed out over the sunlit path and then came back with quiet earnestness to the white paper before her; each movement giving them a fresh beauty. The blood of the young man began to warm, his eyes to brighten. His purpose to speak his mind to Ardis pressed strongly upon him. He had intended to speak in a week, or perhaps two weeks, or in a month, whenever he thought the proper time had come. But now his purpose pressed him very hard. With but an instant's premeditation, he spoke to her:

"Ardis," he said, "you must know how I love you. Will you be my wife?"

"No," she answered quietly, still proceeding with her drawing. "And why do you say such a thing to me at this time?"

"Simply because I could not help it," said Roger. "And tell me," he continued earnestly, grasping at the hope thus held out, "may I speak later; at a better time?"

"No," she answered quickly. "I can tell you now as well as at any other time that I do not wish to marry you. Mr. Prouter, will you please hold your right arm a little higher? You should not ask a girl who has her own ideas of life-work, and is trying hard to carry them out, and to whom new purposes are coming all the time, and who is

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really just beginning life, to drop all her aims and aspirations and marry you."

"Ardis," he said, "you need not give up anything."

"You are mistaken," she answered, taking up a fresh piece of charcoal, "and I say again, I do not wish to marry."

"Do you mean by that," said Roger, "that you do not wish to marry any one?"

"Exactly," she answered, "that is what I mean."

"And then," he asked, in a low voice, but with vehemence, "if you should change your mind, would I have as good a chance as any one?"

"There are no chances for any one," she said.

"Then I stand on as good a footing as any other man?" he persisted.

"With no footing at all," she answered, "you are as well off as any other man."

"Then I may be your friend as I have always been?" said Roger.

"Precisely, as you have always been," replied Ardis. "I shall be glad to have you continue to be that. Mr. Prouter!" she called out, "that will do! Will you please come in now?" And, as her model came skipping back she said to him, "I thank you very much indeed, and I think I have made a good study of a retreating figure."

Roger arose, and in his heart he said: "If she expects to sketch me in that position she is mistaken."

"Capital!" cried Prouter, regarding the sketch with glowing admiration; "I did not know I was such a good runner! I will come and stand for you whenever you want me to. I have nothing to do."

"It is a great pity," said Ardis, "that you have nothing to do. But I need not call on you again, as I can go now without a model."

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When the three returned to the house the young men prepared to depart. Major Claverden invited them to stay to supper, but Dunworth, who was not a man of leisure, declined; and Prouter felt compelled to follow his example.

"Mr. Dunworth," said the young Englishman as he was about to mount into his dog-cart, "I think I will go home with you and spend the night. It is a long time since I have seen the boys, and I want to have a talk with them."

"I shall be delighted to have you do so," said Dunworth, "but you must take me into your cart, and my horse can follow behind."

"All right!" cried Prouter, as Roger, with his bridle in his hand, got into the lofty vehicle, "and if your horse doesn't step out lively, Jerry will pull his head off!"

"The danger is," said Roger, "that he may run over us."

"We shall see about that!" cried Prouter with a crack of his whip.

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CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Prouter and Dunworth arrived at the house of the latter, they perceived the three students of husbandry sitting on a bench which was made of a wide plank fastened between the trunks of two trees in a shady side yard. Their day's work was done, and each of them was smoking a short, brown pipe. Prouter jumped to the ground and ran to greet his countrymen; and Dunworth, when he had given the horses in charge of a servant, went into the house.

"How are you, Parchester? How are you, Skitt? How are you, Cruppledean?" cried Prouter, shaking each by the hand, as, in turn, they arose from the bench. "It is a fortnight since I have seen you."

"Really?" said Parchester, "I did not think it was so long."

"Nor I," said Skitt.

And Cruppledean, the tallest member of the trio, resumed his seat upon the bench without a word.

These pupils of Dunworth were young men of good education and belonged to English families of respectability, but as they had come to Virginia to learn to work like farmers they considered it their duty to conform their dress to their idea of the farm laborer. They wore coarse flannel shirts and their abraded corduroy trousers were tucked into high-topped boots. Prouter took his seat on the bench, Parchester moving a little nearer to Skitt in order to make room for him, and drew from his pockets a short, brown pipe and a bag of tobacco.

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"Time for a puff before supper?" he said, while filling his pipe.

"Oh, yes," said Parchester.

And Prouter, having lighted his pipe with a brimstone match skilfully protected from the wind in the hollow of one hand, joined in the puffing of the others.

"Any news from home?" asked Skitt, removing his pipe for a moment.

"Oh, yes," said Prouter, pulling from the pocket of his shooting jacket a copy of the weekly London "Times," now twelve days old, and handing it to Skitt, "Here is the latest, and I have got the 'Illustrated News' under the cushion of my cart. I'll leave them here, for I have read them."

Skitt opened the paper and began to scan the news columns. These youths never looked at an American journal, and for their knowledge of current events depended entirely upon hearsay or the English papers.

Now the sound of a bell was heard inside the house, and the four young men arose from the bench, knocked out the contents of their pipes, slipped the warm bowls into their pockets, and went in to supper.

The meal was not entirely an out-and-out American one, Dunworth having introduced the English modification of large bowls of warm milk for his pupils in place of the cold lacteal fluid found on every Virginian supper-table; but there was a great dish of broiled ham, a smoking pone of cornmeal, hot wheat bread of various kinds, cold bread and toast, coffee for the host, and tea for the others.

The conversation during the meal was animated, and was principally upon agricultural subjects, mingled with some talk about horses, and more about dogs. It was noticeable, however, that the tall man, Cruppledean, had very little to say.

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After supper they all went out to the porch, where they disposed themselves, some on chairs and some on the steps, to have a smoke. Prouter, however, had not given three puffs before he sprang to his feet.

"By jingo!" he cried. "I forgot the sugar and the rest of the grocery stuff that Mrs. Quantrill asked me to fetch to her."

"Did she want any of them for supper?" asked Skitt.

"That is more than I know," said Prouter, "but their supper is over and done, and there is no use talking about it now." And down he sat.

"And how about the time-table for Miss Airpenny?" asked Dunworth.

For a moment Prouter's face assumed a blank expression, and then it began to glow again. "Let that go in with the sugar," he said. "She can't have it to-night, and there's the end of it! But I will take it to her to-morrow morning, long before she ought to start for anywhere."

"And a jolly time she will have of it to-night," said Skitt, "through not knowing when she is to start on her journey to-morrow."

"Anyway," said Prouter, "it's lots better to forget I ought to go home, than to go home and forget the errand; so I am that much to the good, anyway."

"Where is the old lady going?" asked Parchester.

"I am sure I don't know," said Prouter. "She has been talking of Afghanistan, and as she has been almost everywhere else it's as like as not she is going there."

"Does she travel alone?" asked Dunworth.

"I should say so!" cried Prouter. "There is not a sane person living who would travel with her! And she doesn't want them either. She is able to take care of herself, and when she can't get a conveyance she walks.

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I told her she ought to have a tricycle, and she turned on me with a snap, and said that as long as she had two legs she did not care for three wheels."

"I should like to have a better acquaintance with Miss Airpenny," said Dunworth, rising. "She must be a good sort of woman."

"She is that," said Prouter, "if you get on the right side of her, which I must say has not commonly been my luck."

Dunworth soon retired to a room on the first floor which had been his father's library and study, and was now devoted strictly to his own private use. He did not light the lamp upon the table, but seated himself in an arm-chair by the open window, and gave himself up to thinking.

Of course his thoughts were upon Ardis. She and her words had been present to him ever since he had spoken to her in her studio, but until that quiet hour he had not been able to give up his mind entirely to her. Now he so gave it up. His ideas came to him in no order. He thought of Ardis as a woman he must love, whatever happened, but he also thought of many things which must happen if his life were to be a true and happy one. There came to him visions of existence with Ardis in contrast with the life he now lived. There came to him many visions of what he would do for Ardis, and what Ardis would do for him, and although most of these were the bright fancies of a lover, others were the ideas of a man given to sound thinking.

He did not believe in Ardis's aims or purposes. He had known her so long and he had known her so well, that he was perfectly aware that it was necessary for her ardent nature to exercise its energies upon some engrossing object. That object was now the pursuit of art. He be-

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lieved that some day it would be the love of a husband and the happiness of a home. That he should be that husband and that that home should be his home, was all in all to Roger Dunworth.

As to his chances he felt a quiet encouragement. She had given no reason for declining his offer except that she did not wish to marry anybody. This was reasonable enough. She was yet young, and very many things were occupying her mind; time might be trusted to make room in that mind for love. And, again, she had made no objection to him personally, and had even told him that his chances of winning her were as good as those of anybody else. On the whole he was fairly satisfied.

"I have told her that I love her," he said to himself, "and I have no reason to believe that any other man has done this. Say what she may, she cannot forget my words, and the remembrance of them must have its influence."

With this he arose. A clock in the room was striking ten. He went out to the front of the house to look for his visitor, but could see no one. This gave him no concern, as his pupils could be safely trusted to entertain Prouter in whatever way he wished to be entertained. And thereupon Dunworth went to bed.

When the four young Englishmen had been left to themselves, Skitt remarked that it was a beautiful moonlight night, and that it would be a capital notion to go down to the fence at the foot of the lawn, and sit there and have a smoke; at the same time enjoying the beauty of the scene which would be spread out before them. To this proposition all agreed, and they betook themselves to the fence. When they were well seated on the flat top of the broad fence, and had begun on their freshly lighted pipes, Prouter exclaimed: "What is the matter with you,

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Cruppledean? You have hardly spoken a word since I came here."

"Nothing is the matter," said Cruppledean, shortly.

"I'll tell you what ails him," said Skitt. "He wants to fight."

"Fight!" cried Prouter. "Who does he want to fight with?"

"With the governor," said Skitt.

"Do you mean Mr. Dunworth?"

"Yes, that's the man," was the reply.

"And what have you got against him, Cruppledean?" asked Prouter. "What has he done to you?"

"I haven't anything against him," said Cruppledean, "and he hasn't done anything to me. You don't suppose I would stand that, do you? What I want is to know which is the better man."

"And what is the good of that?" asked Prouter vehemently. "Your governor is a good enough man in many ways, and you are good enough in many ways. What is the sense of fighting to find out which is the better in that way?"

"I don't want to work under any man," said Cruppledean, "without knowing whether he is the better man or I am. That sort of thing is against nature, and I won't stand it!"

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried Prouter.

"No, it isn't stuff and nonsense!" asserted Cruppledean with animation. "Here are Parchester and Skitt; they are under his size and under his weight; they know he is a better man than either of them; and so they are satisfied. But it is different with me. I am nearly as tall as the governor, and quite as heavy, and I am not going to stand round like a milksop, without knowing whether he is the better man or I am."

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"Look here, Cruppledean," cried Prouter, "you let Dunworth alone. He is a good fellow, but I don't believe he cares about sparring, and if you try to get up a match with him it will make trouble. And you are mistaken about height and weight settling the question as to which of two men is the better. Do you think that Dunworth is a better man than I am?"

"Yes, I do," said Cruppledean.

"Very well, then," replied Prouter, "we can settle your point without troubling him. Just step out in some open place in the moonlight, and we will have a few rounds."

"Very good," said Cruppledean, getting down from the fence. "That will settle it one way, but if I am better than you are that leaves his affair still unsettled."

"Come along," said Prouter, vigorously striding off to a smooth place in a field at the bottom of the hill.

Here they had a few rounds in the bright light of the moon, Parchester and Skitt active as seconds. Cruppledean was taller and stronger than his antagonist, with great advantages in length of "reach," but Prouter, who was an admirable boxer, was so quick and lively that he got in as many "good ones" as did the taller man.

After a very moderate amount of this work the seconds interfered and declared the affair a drawn fight, and that one man was as good as the other. The principals thereupon put on their coats and shook hands with the utmost friendliness. Both bore evidences of being somewhat jarred by the encounter, but Cruppledean's spirits were decidedly improved.

"Are you satisfied now?" asked Prouter.

"Yes," said the other, "the thing looks clearer to me, and I know where I stand. It does not do for a fellow to be uncertain about these points. It weighs on his mind. Now, I should say that Dunworth and I are about even."

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"Good!" cried Prouter. "I am glad that is all straightened out. And now let us go up to the house and have a smoke."

The party was quietly puffing away on the steps of the porch when Parchester suddenly rose to his feet. "What is that light out there on the mountain?" he exclaimed.

Each man rose to his feet and looked out in the direction indicated. About half a mile away was a wide stretch of rising ground which attained considerable elevation at its summit. This formed part of Dunworth's farm, and was known as "the mountain." The upper part was heavily wooded, and among the nearer trees a light could be seen moving.

"What does anybody want of a lantern on a bright night like this?" said Skitt.

"It is likely to be some one hunting 'coons," said Parchester.

"And if it is," said Cruppledean, "he hasn't any right to do it."

"How is that?" asked Prouter. "Does Dunworth preserve his 'coons?"

"Can't say," answered Cruppledean, "but I know he does not allow the darkeys to hunt 'coons on his place without permission."

"Is this the season for 'coons?" asked Prouter.

"Can't say," answered Cruppledean, "but there's the light, and you may be sure some sort of mischief is up."

"Let's go after them!" said Skitt.

"Good!" exclaimed the others.

And each man knocked out his ashes and pocketed his pipe. Skitt hurried through the open front door and quickly returned with three heavy blackthorn sticks belonging to himself and his comrades, and a loaded riding-whip which he gave to Prouter. Then the four dashed

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off, cleared a fence, and made straight across the fields toward the mountain. Each man ran at the top of his speed, but Cruppledean's long legs carried him a little ahead of the others.

When they reached the rising ground they separated so as to strike the woods at different points, and thus cut off the retreat of the miscreants. The light could now be plainly seen some distance away among the trees. Cruppledean plunged through the underbrush to the north of the light; Parchester and Skitt rushed this way and that among the trees, keeping somewhat to the south, while Prouter made a straightaway dash directly toward the light. In spite of the bright moonlight it was almost dark in the woods, and the young men found it difficult to avoid the trees and the other objects in their way, but they pressed on with surprising rapidity considering the circumstances, each firmly grasping his weapon and fired with the ardor of pursuit.

Prouter was fortunate enough to strike a wood road, evidently the course taken by the persons carrying the light; and running along this, he soon came upon a little group composed of an old negro and two half-grown boys. The old man carried a light-wood torch, and all three stood still, quaking in their much-worn shoes at the sound of pursuers crashing toward them, apparently from all quarters.

"Lor' bress my soul!" cried the old man, as Prouter plunged at him with upraised whip. "Wot's de matter, sah? Wot you gwine do?" And the three negroes scuttled back against the trunk of a great tree.

"What are you going to do?" cried Prouter, still brandishing his whip. "What do you mean by coming here to hunt 'coons?"

"Bress your soul, sah!" exclaimed the man. "I's

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huntin' no 'coons! I come heah to look fer my black hog wot git away dis mawnin'."

At this moment Cruppledean came up, and Parchester and Skitt quickly appeared. With upraised cudgels the party surrounded the negroes, the torch throwing the only light upon the scene.

"He says he is looking for his hog," said Prouter.

"Gammon!" cried Cruppledean. "It must be nearly twelve o'clock. A pretty time to be looking for a hog!"

"But I tell you, sah," said the old man, "I done begin to look fer him as soon as I got froo my work. I tell you, sah, it takes a long time to look fer a hog when he gits away in de mawnin'."

"I bet five to three, and make it shillings," said Parchester, "that he is after 'coons."

"Bress your soul, sah," said the negro, turning to him, "who wants 'coons or 'possums, airy one, when dey ain't fat yit? An' whar's de axe or de dogs I got to hunt 'em wid?"

"Do they hunt 'coons with axes and dogs?" asked Prouter.

"Yes," said Cruppledean, "I have heard they do."

Prouter and the pupils now stood and looked at the negroes, the two boys crouching behind their father as if they expected at any moment to get a rap over the head.

"Well, then," presently remarked Skitt, "if he really is looking for his hog we may as well let him go on and look for it."

"Which I most sart'inly is, sah," said the man.

"But look here," said Prouter, "if you do come into this wood looking for hogs, don't you look for them as if you were hunting 'coons. Do you hear that?"

"Yes, sah," said the man.

And as there now seemed nothing more for them to do,

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the four self-constituted keepers turned to depart. The negro politely preceded them with his torch to light them out of the woods; and when they reached the open each young man put his hand in his pocket and tipped the torch-bearer.

"If it wasn't so late," said Cruppledean, "we would go with you and help you hunt your hog."

"Much obliged, sah, but I reckon you'd skeer him wuss dan you'd ketch him."

The party walked gayly down the declivity and over the fields, and when they reached the house they sat down to resume the smoke which had been interrupted. When this was finished they went in-doors, and Skitt, who was a careful man, shut the front door after him. They went into the dining-room, where a light was burning, and Cruppledean produced a bottle of spirits, apologizing to Prouter for not having any hot water; it being so late of course the kitchen fire was out. Parchester produced some hard biscuit and cheese from the sideboard; and each man having mixed his drink to suit himself, they partook of a light supper.

Cruppledean now proposed that they should go out on the porch and have a smoke, but Parchester declared that if they intended to work the next day they must go to bed. And this being generally agreed to they took lamps and went up-stairs. Cruppledean and Skitt occupied a large bedroom, and across the hall was Parchester's room with a spare bed in it for Prouter.

Cruppledean seated himself by the open window of his room to have a smoke, and Skitt went to bed. In the other room Prouter, his coat off and one shoe in his hand, sat for some minutes immersed in thought.

"Parchester," he said, "come into Skitt's room. I have something I want to say to all of you."

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And unevenly clumping across the hall, he seated himself on a corner of the table in the other bedroom.

"Fellows," said he, "I have just been making up my mind. I am going to do something!"

"Then why don't you go and do it?" asked Skitt, who was sleepy.

Disregarding this remark, Prouter went on. "I am the only fellow among you who doesn't work. You all work, Dunworth works, the Quantrills work, every one of them, and even old Miss Airpenny works. I don't do anything. I just go around with my hands in my pockets and look at other people work. I am going to stop it. I am ashamed of it. I began to be ashamed of it yesterday when a pretty girl said to me—the prettiest girl, by the way, I ever laid eyes on——"

"Who was it?" asked Skitt, with awakening animation.

"Miss Claverden," said Prouter.

"You are right there!" exclaimed Parchester, while the now awakened Skitt offered to bet his head on the fact, and even Cruppledean gave an affirmative nod.

"She said to me," continued Prouter, "when I told her that I was ready any day to stand as a model for her, having nothing to do——"

"A model!" cried Parchester. "A pretty model you'd make!"

"Well, she only took my back," said Prouter, "so you need not be jealous. And she said to me when I told her I had nothing to do, 'That is a pity!' And ever since I have been thinking it is a pity. Now I am going to stop it! I intend to work!"

"What are you going to do?" said Cruppledean.

"That is the rub," said Prouter, "or, at least, that was the rub until a little while ago. Now I have settled it. I am going to start a milk route."

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The three pupils burst into a roar of laughter.

"You needn't laugh," said Prouter. "I have got it all straightened out in my mind. It is of no use for me to try a farm, or to grow vines or wool, or to go into anything of that sort. I don't know how and haven't time to learn. But I can manage a milk route just as well as anybody. I have been watching a milk route lately, and know exactly how the thing is done. It will be just the sort of business I like. Lively and brisk! Lots of cutting around to see if the cows are all right and the men at their work, the wagons all started off bright and early, the customers all satisfied. I'm wild to get at it. By jingo! I will go down and tell Dunworth!"

And before his laughing friends could stop him he had clumped down the stairs to the room on the first floor where the master of the house slept, and knocked loudly on the door. Dunworth had been asleep three or four hours and awoke with a start.

"Hello!" he cried.

Prouter opened the door and put in his head.

"What is it?" exclaimed Dunworth, sitting up in bed. "Is it fire?"

The room was but dimly lighted by the moon, but Prouter could see that Dunworth was just about to spring out of bed. "No," cried the young Englishman, "I am going to start a milk route."

"What!" exclaimed Dunworth.

"I am going to start a milk route," repeated Prouter; "and I thought it mean to let the other fellows know without coming to tell you too."

At this moment Dunworth jumped heavily to the floor, but before he could reach the door Prouter shut it with a jerk and sped up-stairs, one shoe off and one shoe on, and his breast full of merriment and rapturous enthusiasm. He

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talked but little more of his plans because the others insisted that he should go to bed and let them sleep; but before sunrise the next morning he had harnessed his horse Jerry to his dog-cart and had driven away at top speed to take the sugar and grocery stuff to the Quantrills, to give the time-table to Miss Airpenny, and to make arrangements for the starting of his milk route.

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CHAPTER V.

DR. LESTER lived in a small house which stood in the spacious yard of a large house. The latter building had been partially burned years before, and was now uninhabited. It belonged to m mbers of Dr. Lester's family, and while living in the small house he was enabled to keep an eye upon the property. It may also be said that it suited him perfectly to live by himself in this independent manner. About a quarter of a mile away was a cabin, in which dwelt an old negro woman who cooked for him and attended to his house.

The doctor was a good friend to all the colored people in the neighborhood. They came to him for advice and information and for the solution of knotty points of difference. Only in one respect could they expect no counsel from him. He would not prescribe, even for the most trifling ailment. If anything was the matter with their bodies he would send them to a ˎoctor, and he had been known in urgent cases to go himself for a physician to attend to some suffering negro. But to a question involving negro notions of law and equity he would give his most earnest attention and thought; and his decisions were generally accepted as final.

The doctor's house consisted of one large room, with a little adjoining chamber in which he slept. The walls of the large room were lined with books, nearly all of them old and of a standard character; and specimens of minerals, dried plants, animals and birds occupied every available shelf and corner. A work-bench stood at one win-

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dow, a turning-lathe near by; and wherever there was room for them could be seen little machines and contrivances, or articles of use and ornament, which the doctor had made, and which indicated an untiring industry joined with skill and ingenuity, but without commensurate aim.

Dr. Lester was sitting by his open door in a large leathern arm-chair, the cushions of which were so worn into hollows that they would have been a torture to any one who had not, like the doctor, learned to adapt himself to their eccentricities. Opposite to him, on a smaller chair, sat Bonetti. Both were smoking pipes with long reed stems and bowls made of the red Powhatan clay so much prized by Virginians of the older school. The afternoon was bright and cheerful; the doctor was glad to have some one drop in on him; and Bonetti was in his usual good-humor. But now for some minutes neither had spoken a word. Bonetti much desired to talk about Miss Claverden, and to find out what the doctor had said, done, or thought in the direction of that young lady since he had last seen him. But there were times when the doctor did not care to talk upon this subject, and as this might be one of those times Bonetti hesitated about broaching his questions.

Suddenly he started. "Ho!" he cried, "here she comes!"

"Who?" asked the doctor, looking quickly toward the door.

"Miss Ardis," said Bonetti. "She is coming down the road in the open carriage with the bay horses, and George is driving with his high-top hat on. She is coming in style."

The doctor gave one look outside, then sprang to his feet, put down his pipe, and stepping to a small looking-glass, swiftly combed his somewhat rumpled hair, brushed the collar of his coat, and approached the door.

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"Where are you going?" said Bonetti.

"I shall speak to her as she passes," said the doctor.

Bonetti also put down his pipe and went out, but to the surprise of the two men the carriage did not pass. It turned into the grass-grown drive-way at the other end of the yard, and sweeping past the ruined house, stopped before the doctor's door.

Miss Ardis sat alone in the carriage. She was handsomely dressed in a costume which would have been suited to a round of city calls, but with some of that additional touch of the picturesque which is allowable in the country. She carried a large, light-colored parasol, and on her face was a smile of friendly greeting.

"How do you do, doctor?" she said, extending her hand.

The doctor gently enveloped the little tan-colored glove in his large, sinewy hand. His bare head was bowed a little as if he had been momentarily impressed with an emotion of reverence. Bonetti stood a little in the rear of the doctor, his hat in his hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Bonetti?" said Ardis in the same cheerful, friendly tone in which she had spoken before, but she did not extend her hand.

"Dr. Lester," said Ardis, "I am on my way to the Dalrymple place, and I have stopped here to ask a favor of you."

"The thing shall be done, Miss Ardis," said the doctor, "whatever it may be."

She looked at him with a little sparkle in her eye. "Never smoke again!" she said solemnly.

The doctor opened his eyes wide, and on Bonetti's face there came a look of astonishment; but before either of them could speak Ardis laughed and said: "Don't be frightened, doctor. That was merely to show you how, if I chose, I could punish you for making such rash promises."

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"I trust so implicitly to your generosity and justice, Miss Ardis, that I am not afraid to make a blind promise to you."

"Take my advice," said she, "and never trust anybody so far as that. And now for my business. Father has invited a gentleman to come and stay at our house for some days; indeed, I don't know for how long. Father will take care of him sometimes, of course, but I don't believe our visitor cares very much for grapevines or farming, and I am afraid that time will hang heavy on his hands. I want the gentlemen of the neighborhood to call on him, and especially you, doctor, for you can help ever so much to make his time pass pleasantly. And I may send him to you, Mr. Bonetti, if he needs a guide and adviser in any out-door explorations."

"I shall be glad to do anything I can for a friend of yours, Miss Ardis," said Bonetti.

"Is the gentleman a middle-aged man or a young one?" asked the doctor.

"He is moderately young," said Ardis.

"Is he a city man?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, "but I know he likes the country, and has travelled almost everywhere, I believe. He is Mr. Surrey, of Washington. Will you not ask some of the gentlemen to call on him—I know he is fond of company—Mr. Dunworth, for instance, and those young Englishmen who are at his house? They are very pleasant young men."

"All you have to do is to speak to Dunworth about that," said the doctor. "I am sure he is at your service in every way."

"But I don't care to go about the country," said Ardis, with a laugh, "asking young men to come to see another young man. I wish you would mention the matter to Mr. Dunworth some time soon."

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"Of course I will do that, Miss Ardis," said the doctor, "but it seems to me it is not such a very long time ago since I saw you ride at full gallop up to Dunworth's door, with your two dogs after you, and invite him and everybody else to Bald Hill to supper and a dance afterward."

"Your memory goes back more years than you suppose," said Ardis, laughing. "That sort of thing may have been, but it is not. Haven't you noticed that people sometimes grow older, doctor? Now, I may depend on you to help us entertain Mr. Surrey, may I not?"

"You may always depend upon me," said the doctor.

"Thank you ever so much," said Ardis; and with a farewell smile and nod which included them both, she drove away.

The doctor stood silent, his eyes on the swiftly departing carriage.

"Suppose," said Bonetti, reflectively, "she were to say to you: 'There are a number of persons who are trying to marry me, and if any one of them succeeds, misery will come upon me. You are the only one who can protect me from this danger. If you will marry me, I am safe.' What would you say in such a case?"

"Bonnet," cried the doctor, "if you had lived in the Middle Ages they would have made you a mental torturer! How dare you rack me in that way—and at this moment, too?"

"I merely wanted to know," said Bonetti, "if there was anything that would make you let go your resolution; but if you are not prepared to answer, no matter. It seems to me that she has not given you a very agreeable piece of business."

"Agreeable!" exclaimed the doctor, "I should say not! It would suit me much better to make it unpleasant for a

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young city man coming into these parts than to make him want to stay."

"But you are going to make it pleasant for him?" said the other.

"Bonnet," replied Dr. Lester, "if she were to ask me to sit on a hot rock and bake batter-cakes for Apollyon, I would do it! But I don't pretend to say that I would like it."

As Bonetti walked slowly homeward, about half an hour afterward, he said to himself: "I have made supposes about most of the fixes that Dr. Lester could get himself into concerning this matter, but there is one thing that I haven't worked up yet, and that is what will happen when Miss Ardis finds out how Dr. Lester thinks about her. She hasn't the least notion of it now; that's as plain as daylight. And the main point of the matter is, not so much what she will do when she finds it out, as what he will do when she has done what she will do when she finds it out." And pondering on this question, the philosophizer pursued his leisurely way.

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CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Ardis Claverden had driven away from Dr. Lester's door, and had reached the high road, she leaned forward to her coachman and said: "George, those horses have been doing nothing for two days. Now, don't let them loiter on the road!"

George was a dashing coachman as well as a skilful one, and for that reason his position in the Bald Hill establishment was secure. Sympathizing thoroughly with the liking of his young mistress for rapid motion, he touched up his two bays; both animals of good blood, raised, broken, and trained on the Bald Hill farm. They did not loiter, but with swift strides sped over the road. Bowling over the smooth stretches; dashing up the hills with a strong, hard trot, but pulling up to a slower pace on the descents; cautiously and skilfully passing over the stony spots, but not always with slackened speed; with his horses tossing their heads in their enjoyment of their free, swift motion, George drew up at the Dalrymple house before even Ardis thought there had been time to get there.

Ardis was but slightly acquainted with this family, but they were new-comers and she was very willing to be civil to them and, should there be reason for it, to be friendly with them.

On the other hand, Mrs. Dalrymple disliked Ardis, or, as she would have put it, disapproved of her. She considered her manner of life as entirely too independent for a young girl. She thought Miss Claverden should have

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an elderly lady to live in the house and chaperone her. She did not think a young woman should be driving around the country by herself, and although she knew of nothing unseemly that Ardis had ever done, except allowing her coachman to dash up a driveway at an improper rate of speed, she felt assured that an independent young woman who would do such an unseemly thing would do a great many other unseemly things.

Miss Dalrymple could not make up her mind whether she disliked Ardis or envied her. There were often times when she would have liked to do as she pleased, but there were also times when she looked with aversion upon people who did as they pleased. Should she ever decide to imitate Ardis, she would probably be a blind follower of her as far as circumstances would allow, but should she decide to disapprove of her, her disapproval would be very strong. At present Miss Cecilia Dalrymple did not wish to commit herself in any way, and her few remarks did not add to the interest of the conversation.

Mr. Dalrymple liked Ardis. When he returned from the call at Bald Hill he spoke very highly of her. He said he thought she was a fine, spirited girl, of remarkably pleasant manners, and very handsome, and he thought it might be a very good thing for Cecilia if the two were to become friends. But these remarks had no influence, or at least no favorable influence, on the opinions of his wife and daughter; and as he was not at home that afternoon, his good opinion of Ardis was of no advantage in making her call a pleasant one.

"Did you not say the other day," remarked Ardis to Mrs. Dalrymple, "that you have a son whom you expect here shortly?"

Mrs. Dalrymple opened her eyes and hardened her mouth. She would have glanced at her daughter, but

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Ardis was looking at her. "Yes," said she, "I have a son, and we expect him in a few days."

"I am glad to hear it," said Ardis, "because there is to be a gentleman at our house who, I fear, will find the place very dull. We shall be so glad if your son will call upon him. It would be difficult to regulate the etiquette in such a case, I suppose. Father visits very little, and it is scarcely to be expected that he should call on a young man, and of course there is no one else in our house to do it."

"I should say not," remarked Mrs. Dalrymple, very decidedly.

"But out here in the country," continued Ardis, "we get over those things in as easy and as friendly a way as possible; and if your son should ride down and see father and Mr. Surrey, I am sure they would both be delighted."

Mrs. Dalrymple made no promises for her son. She thanked Ardis and passed to another subject.

When the visitor arose the two ladies accompanied her to the door; and as the carriage drove away Mrs. Dalrymple looked after it and remarked: "I hope I shall never see you, Cecilia, driving about the country by yourself in that way!"

At that moment Cecilia was thinking that it would be the most delightful thing in the world to sit alone in a carriage like that, and be driven wherever she wanted to go, and just as fast as she wanted to go.

"And never in my life," continued Mrs. Dalrymple, "did I hear anything as barefaced as that girl's speech! Actually to ask me to send my son to see her! I wouldn't have expected that, even of Miss Ardis Claverden!"

Cecilia's mind was on the point of revolving, but the influence of the carriage was still strong upon her. "I

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don't suppose that Egbert would care for a girl like that," she said, abstractedly.

As Ardis drove away the air seemed pleasanter to her, the sky brighter above her than she had remembered it as she drove toward the house. She did not know that Mrs. Dalrymple did not like her, or that Miss Dalrymple was in doubt about her, but the sense of relief which came upon her as she left them, although she did not recognize its true nature, was agreeable to her.

"Now I will go to Heatherley," she said to George.

A drive of about three miles, the last portion of which was on a private road through pasture land, brought them to a large house which stood well in upon its own domain. This was the homestead of the Crantons, a family of large size and extensive ramifications. The house had once been in better condition; the family had once been richer; but there was an air of life and movement about the place which made it much more interesting and attractive than many of the better houses of richer people. There were dogs on the porch and dogs wandering here and there around the house. A flock of turkeys scattered themselves over the lawn, which sloped by several natural terraces down to a little stream or "branch." Some colts scampered through the apple orchard which stretched itself around three sides of the house. Little darky children sat playing on the grass. A large negro girl, holding in her arms a very little one, stood gazing at the new-comers. At a cluster of log-cabins, a short distance from the house, colored women were coming and going. Two stout negro boys were cutting wood. On a grassy road by the branch a long line of cows were coming in from pasture, a small boy in the rear cracking a home-made whip. A heavy farm wagon, laden with great logs of wood and drawn by four horses, with a colored man

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on the near wheeler, bestriding a brass-mounted army saddle and wearing enormous high boots, came creaking up toward the wood-cutters. Altogether, the place much resembled a Southern farm of the olden time.

Ardis ran up the steps of the porch, patting the heads of two or three dogs as she did so, while George drove over to the cabins to have a chat with his friends and, possibly, relatives. There was nobody in the great hall; nobody in the parlor, the door of which stood wide open; nobody in the dining-room, and nobody on the stairs. But Ardis, who felt perfectly at home, knew where to go to look for her particular friend Norma, whom especially she had come to see.

Norma Cranton was the housekeeping daughter of the family, and Ardis's intimate acquaintance with her disposition and habits prompted her to make her way directly to the store-room. In this large, well-filled room she found Norma, a long apron reaching from her chin to her toes, and her plump face a little dappled with flour, sitting before a small table on which were spice boxes and a cookery book. Norma was short, somewhat stoutly built, with a pleasing face, a genial nature, and passionately fond of Ardis. She sprang to her feet, and forgetting the existence of such a thing as flour, kissed her visitor again and again. The colored woman who was assisting Norma brought a chair for Ardis, and then departed, knowing that work for the present was suspended.

"What I particularly came for," said Ardis, presently, "is to ask you to come and spend a few days with me, or perhaps a week, or it may be even longer."

"Now?" asked Norma.

"Yes; to-morrow."

"Simply impossible," said Norma. "To-morrow I

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begin to preserve peaches. I have bushels of them all ready. Why do you want me now?"

"Father has invited a gentleman to come and stay at our house," said Ardis. "It was a most unexpected thing to me. This gentleman, Mr. Surrey, I met last winter at Aunt Mabel's, in Washington, and the other day he wrote to me that he was coming to Bolton for a few days and asked permission to call on me. I mentioned the matter to father and he immediately sat down and wrote to Mr. Surrey, inviting him to stay at our house during his sojourn in this neighborhood. The fact that he was a friend of his sister Mabel was enough for father. Of course I was dreadfully disturbed when I heard that the letter had gone, but there was no help for it then, and I said nothing about it. Father interferes so little in the management of these things that I could not bear to find fault with him for this."

"Is he a young man?" asked Norma.

"Well, he is not exactly a young man," said Ardis, "but I don't believe he is thirty. He has been married once, and his wife soon died and left him with a little son, now four years old. There is something very odd about this, for the child is rich, the property coming from the mother's family, while Mr. Surrey has no money to speak of. He has not even the care of his boy."

"How did that come about?" asked Norma.

"Aunt Mabel told me the story, but I don't remember it exactly," said Ardis. "But the point is that a grandfather made a will by which Mr. Surrey was not to have anything to do with the boy's money or the child himself. And of course Mr. Surrey had to agree to that or else keep his son out of a fortune."

"I wouldn't have given up one of my sons for any fortune!" said Norma. "And if this gentleman is a widower, I suppose your father thinks him an elderly man."

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"I have no doubt of it," said Ardis, "though I never thought of that before. But I do know that he expects Mr. Surrey to be his visitor, and I am sure he will find that he is mistaken. That man, I am sure, prefers the society of young people to that of his elders, and it will simply end in his being thrown on my hands."

"Is he good-looking?" asked Norma.

"In a certain way, yes," said Ardis. "He is rather too florid, and somewhat inclined to be heavy; but he is very bright and lively and full of fun, and that often makes him look handsomer than he really is."

"And how long is he going to stay?" said Norma.

"I really do not know—certainly a few days; but father will keep him with us as long as he is down here. He comes on business, I think. But, as I told you, Norma, I know very well that he is not going to be father's visitor; and so I have asked Dr. Lester to come to see him and to get some of the young men of the neighborhood to drop in. Will not your brother Curtis come?"

"My dear Ardis," cried Norma, "you know Curtis is so bashful that if you were to ask him to call on a gay city gentleman, he would betake himself to the woods and stay there."

"Curtis or no Curtis, I intend to have Norma," said Ardis.

"But, Ardis," exclaimed Norma, "you see how I am situated. To-morrow I must go to work at my peaches, and the next day there will be ever so much that will have to be straightened out. The day after that I might go to you, perhaps, for a day or two."

"Norma," said Ardis, "Mr. Surrey is coming the day after to-morrow. I want you in the house with me when he arrives."

"But, Ardis——"

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"No buts," said Ardis. "Everything shall be arranged. I shall stay here and help you with your peaches. I will go now and send George home with a message to father that I am to be sent for to-morrow evening, and that I shall take you to Bald Hill with me. We will get up very early to-morrow morning; you shall lend me one of your old dresses, and those peaches shall all be in their jars and everything shall be straightened up in time for us two to get to Bald Hill to supper."

And without waiting to hear her friend's remarks on this arrangement, Ardis ran out to send George and the carriage home.

Very early the next morning the two girls were up and at work; Ardis in a blue-spotted calico gown, somewhat too short and a good deal too wide for her, and with a white apron fastened up under her chin. All the colored assistance which could be conveniently employed was called in, and throughout the morning and a portion of the afternoon the paring, the stoning, the cutting, the boiling, the bubbling, the sweetening, the tasting, the dipping, the pouring, and the talk went on. Ardis lent a hand to everything, but besides the work she did herself she found time to make others work as they had never worked before. She would even run out to hasten the motions of the boys who were cutting the wood which the great stove so steadily devoured.

About four o'clock in the afternoon everything was finished except a few little matters of "straightening out" which Norma could very well attend to by herself, and Ardis, heated and quite satiated with the smell of cooking peaches, went out into the air and took a seat on the shaded front porch. She had been sitting here but a few minutes when a white boy mounted on a large, fine horse rode up to the house.

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"Is Mr. Curtis in?" he asked.

"No," said Ardis, "he is out at work on the lowlands."

"Is any of the men here?" said the boy.

"They are all out with Mr. Curtis. I know that he took every one of them."

"Is Harrison Cranton here?" asked the boy.

"No," said Ardis, with a smile, "even Harrison has gone with his brother. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"No, ma'am," said the boy, with a doleful expression. "One of the young steers that was just bought has got away and is going home just as fast as he can, and Tom Harris put me on this horse and told me to go after him. But the steer, he keeps a-runnin' and I can't get ahead of him with this horse."

"Are you afraid of the horse?" asked Ardis.

"I'm not afraid of him when he walks, but when I make him go fast he charges, and when he charges he skeers me, so I just turned him in here, reckonin' Mr. Curtis was home."

"And you thought if Mr. Curtis were here he would get on the horse and head off the steer for you?" asked Ardis.

"Yes, ma'am," said the boy. "He wouldn't care if the horse charged all he had a mind to."

Ardis came forward to the steps and looked at the horse. He was a magnificent animal. She had been shut up all day in a hot and stifling room. "Wait one minute," she said to the boy, "and everything shall be made right for you." And with this she went into the house and ran up-stairs.

In one of the rooms she found an old riding-skirt belonging to Norma. This she quickly slipped on, and from the room of the boy Harrison she took a pair of his top boots, which she found fitted her very well. She dashed

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into her room, got her gloves, and ran down-stairs. She took a soft felt hat from the rack, put it on, and went out to the boy.

"I will ride your horse and go after the steer," she said. "I feel just like taking a good gallop!"

"O ma'am," cried the boy, "this isn't the kind of horse for a lady to ride!"

"Any kind of a horse is the kind for me to ride," said Ardis, going down the steps, "except a poor one. Now get down, and I will hold him while you run to the carriage-house and bring that side-saddle that you will see hanging on a peg close to the door."

The boy looked astonished, but got down. "He'll run away with you," he said deprecatingly, as his feet touched the ground.

"I'll attend to that!" said Ardis. "And you be quick, or your steer will get entirely away."

The boy ran to the carriage-house and soon returned with the saddle. Under Ardis's directions he quickly put it on the horse, in place of the one on which he had ridden, and then, having carefully examined the girth and the stirrup, she prepared to mount. "Lead him up here!" she said, as she stood on one of the porch steps. But the horse tossed his head and refused to turn around so that she could reach him.

"Go on that side of him, and give him a good smack!" said Ardis.

The boy, half-frightened at his own presumption, gave the horse a "smack," and the animal moving with a start toward the steps, Ardis laid hold of the pommel and sprang into the saddle. Quickly giving herself a firm seat, she took the bridle from the boy, and with a little help from him she put her foot in the stirrup. The horse wheeled around as soon as the boy released the

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bridle, and Ardis called out: "Oh, I forgot the whip! Run in and get me one from the rack, please!"

"Oh, you mustn't hit him!" exclaimed the boy. "If you hit him he'll jump right out of his skin!"

"I will hit him just hard enough to make him jump nearly out of his skin, but not quite," said Ardis. "Get me the whip!"

The boy said no more, but brought her a heavy riding-whip which belonged to Mr. Curtis.

"It is too big," said she, "but no matter. Which way did your steer go?"

"He's gone up the road, and if he finds a break in the fence he'll cut across the fields and git into the woods, and if he does that we'll never ketch him. He'll go straight through to Page County, where he was raised."

"Take your saddle down to the gate," said Ardis, "and wait for me there."

At first the horse appeared inclined to be dissatisfied with his rider. He danced sidewise and made one or two revolutions, but a sharp tap on the flank and a firm hand on the bit soon brought him to his senses, and he started off on a quick trot. Out on the high road Ardis could see nothing of the fugitive steer, but urging her horse into a gallop she soon caught sight of the animal far up the road.

A dash of a few minutes brought the sound of her horse's hoofs to the ears of the young steer. He threw up his head and broke into a wild run. Not far ahead was a turn in the road, and there a gate into a field stood open. This field was a wide hillside of coarse grass and sassafras bushes, intersected here and there by deep gullies. Directly toward the nearest of these the steer made his way, plunged down into it, and bounded up on the other side. When Ardis reached it he was rapidly

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making his way diagonally across the hillside toward a stretch of forest land half a mile away.

The horse was now thoroughly excited. Had not Ardis held him strongly back he would have dashed into the gully; it was too wide for him to leap; but Ardis knew that where young cattle may safely scramble, horses may come to grief, and turning her steed she made for the head of the gully. She now saw that a rough cart-track led from the gate through which she had passed by a wide, circuitous bend around the heads of several gullies up to an opening in the woods, where there was probably a roadway through the forest. To this opening the steer was evidently directing his course, and if he got into the narrow road Ardis might despair of being able to head him off. But although the distance by the cart-track was greater than that which the steer would travel, Ardis knew that it would be better for her to follow it than to endeavor to cross the gullies.

She put the horse to the top of his speed and dashed up the road. There was no need of urging that animal. Once on fire with the consciousness that he could go as fast as he pleased, he thundered over the ground. Never before had Ardis had such a horse beneath her! She could feel the swift play of his powerful muscles; his hot breath flew past her; her own blood was hot in her veins; it seemed as if she herself were making those tremendous bounds; as if she were a wild, free, powerful being, rushing through the sparkling air.

Her own riding-mare was a fine animal, speedy and true, but this fellow was a king of horses, and his blood was up.

The steer was within fifty yards of the woods when Ardis rounded the last gully. The runaway animal saw his opportunity, and was galloping madly. Ardis leaned

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forward and shouted to her horse, who, throwing all his fire, all his mighty strength, into one wild burst of speed, rushed at the opening, almost brushed the steer, and dashed past him. Three lengths within the roadway, shut in on each side by heavy timber and underbrush, Ardis brought him up and whirled him round, his hoofs striking fire from the loose stones and his haunches crushing into the brushwood. A low bough took off her hat, but she did not know it, nor that the heel of her boot had scratched the bark from a tree. The steer was before her, about to rush past her. Urging her horse, trembling and tramping with excitement, directly upon the wild-eyed creature, she leaned forward, brandishing her whip in the face of the steer until the animal snorted, backed, and then turned and rushed out of the woods.

Ardis was instantly after him. She had him now in her power. Her horse could move more swiftly than he could, and whenever the steer made a dash toward the woods, Ardis interposed herself and her whip. Presently the steer stopped, Ardis charged upon him, and he set off down the cart-track on a trot. Once or twice he veered toward the gullies, but Ardis kept close to him and turned him to the way he should go, and, at last, fixing his eyes on the open gateway he galloped toward it, and out of it.

Of course the steer turned the wrong way and went up the road, but Ardis rode out of the gate, and, without dismounting, closed and latched it. Then she galloped after the steer, and as he had but little start of her she soon passed him and turned him. Now patting the neck, and quieting down the fierce excitement of the grand animal she rode, she drove the steer back to Heatherley.

Ardis found the boy sitting on the gate-post. He received her with an air of subdued admiration. Springing to the ground, she said: "You can change the saddles

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here and leave this one at the gate. I will send for it. Do you think you can drive the steer home now? He must be tired of running."

"Oh, yes, ma'am," said the boy, "I can make him go ahead now. But where's your hat, ma'am?"

Ardis put her hand to her head. "I have lost it," she said, "and I really did not miss it. And now you tell Tom Harris not to put you on such a horse as that again. By-the-way, where is Tom Harris working now?"

"He is working for Mr. Dunworth," said the boy.

"Is that Mr. Dunworth's horse?" exclaimed Ardis.

"Yes, ma'am."

"And that his steer?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Ardis looked at the boy. A little frown succeeded by a li tle smile appeared upon her face; and without further remark she walked to the house.

"Ardis," said Norma to her friend with the bright eyes and glowing cheeks, "it doesn't matter in the least about the hat; I don't know who it belonged to and it will never be missed, for there are always hats enough and to spare, and as for the skirt, it was an old one anyway and those places can easily be mended; but there was not the least necessity for your going after that runaway creature."

"Necessity! Of course not!" said Ardis. "I wanted a bit of wild exhilaration to take away the smell of cooked peaches; and I assure you, Norma, it took it away."

"I wonder what Mr. Surrey would have said," remarked Norma, "if he could have seen you riding after cattle in that style!"

"Mr. Surrey!" exclaimed Ardis, "I give myself no concern about what he thinks or says."

If there was a slight emphasis on the word he, Norma did not perceive it.

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CHAPTER VII.

ON the afternoon of the next day Norma Cranton was sitting in the library at Bald Hill. She was busily engaged upon a piece of most deliberate handiwork by which a rural scene was evolved in minute stitches upon a piece of linen. At a table near by sat Major Claverden, reading a book of old plays. Suddenly he exclaimed:

"Upon my word! would you believe that the poet Gray was a plagiarist?"

"No," cried Norma, looking up suddenly with a flush upon her face, "I would not believe anything of the kind."

"Well, then, listen to this," said he. "Here in the Epilogue to the play of 'Every One Has His Fault,' by Mrs. Inchbald, is this line:

"'Oft climb the knee the envied kiss to share.'"

"Gray does not use exactly those words in his Elegy," said Norma. "He says:

"'Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.'"

"But my conscience!" said the major, "that's near enough to be the most outrageous plagiarism!"

"When was that play written?" asked Norma, her face sparkling with indignant loyalty.

Major Claverden turned back to the title page. "It was published in 1795," he said.

"And the poet Gray died in 1771," said Norma. "Does that look much like plagiarism on *his* part?" And she put a series of indignant stitches into a duck's tail.

Major Claverden looked severely at the book. "It is

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plain to me," he said, "that M. P. Andrews, Esquire, who wrote this Epilogue was not a gentleman. If he had marked the line with a quotation, its use would have been perfectly proper, but now we have no reason to believe that he did not steal his other lines. But I suppose," he continued, as he closed the book, "that gentlemen were as scarce in those days as they are now."

"I do not believe they were scarce in those days," said Norma, flushing up again. "That was a gentlemanly age."

"Well," said the major with a smile, "we will not discuss the manners or morals of that period."

Notwithstanding this remark, Norma was about to begin a defence of the morals and manners of that period, when a carriage from the town drove up in front of the door.

Major Claverden arose and looked through the open window. "This must be Mr. Surrey!" he said. And he hastened out of the room.

A gentleman attired in a dark-plaid travelling suit, with a light overcoat over his arm, had sprung out of the carriage before the major appeared on the porch, and was ordering the driver to put down a large, leathern valise, on the top of which was strapped a silver-headed cane and an umbrella. The major hurried down the steps, but before he reached the bottom the gentleman stepped briskly toward him with extended hand.

"Delighted to see you, Major Claverden," he said. "My name is Surrey."

As the two men were exchanging the civilities common upon such occasions, Norma Cranton stood in the hallway and observed the newcomer. She saw a man of medium height, strongly built, with good features, a lively expression, and a heavy, reddish-brown moustache. His apparel was handsome and if not of that fashion called "loud," might, preserving the same line of simile, be termed dis-

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tinct. A person conversant with social demeanors might have judged that Mr. Surrey not only appeared to be a man of the world, but desired to appear as such.

Norma was not a judge of social demeanors. She knew very little of society except what existed in her State and county at the present day, or had existed on the other side of the ocean in the last century. She saw nothing in Mr. Surrey to which she knew how to object, and yet she did not approve of him. "I believe," she said to herself, "that he would plagiarize just as soon as not!" And then she went forward to meet the gentleman, who was just entering the door.

Major Claverden presented Mr. Surrey to Miss Cranton, and then inquired for his daughter.

"I will go and find her," said Norma; and she departed with alacrity.

Ardis was in her own room, sitting by an open window, reading.

"Don't you know Mr. Surrey is here?" exclaimed Norma, as she entered.

Ardis laid the book in her lap without closing it. "I heard carriage-wheels," she said, "and supposed he had come."

"Then why don't you go down?" said Norma.

"There is no hurry," said Ardis. But she closed the book and went down.

Ardis welcomed Mr. Surrey with that charming cordiality which she always showed to her father's guests. The visitor was surprised as well as delighted when he saw her.

"By George!" he said to himself, "she dresses as correctly here in the backwoods as if she were at Newport!"

That night, when the family at Bald Hill had gone to their rooms, Norma came and sat down by Ardis. Her expression was very serious.

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"There is something," she said, "of which I feel positively certain, and which I think you ought to know, and yet I don't know whether to speak of it to you or not."

"If I ought to know it, you should tell it," said Ardis.

Norma sat silent for a moment. "Very well, then," she said, "I will speak plainly. I have been observing Mr. Surrey very attentively this evening, especially his manner of speaking to you and looking at you; and I am firmly convinced that he has no business of any importance whatever at Bolton; and that he came into this county on purpose to see you; and, more than that, that he wants to marry you. Now, Ardis, I have spoken in this candid way to you because I think you ought not to remain in ignorance of these things for a single hour."

"My dear Norma," said Ardis, with a smile, "I am ever so much obliged to you for telling me this out of your good, kind heart; but truly, my dear, I saw it all for myself."

"And what are you going to do about it?" asked Norma.

"I shall do nothing," replied Ardis. "It is not my affair."

"But he will make it your affair," persisted Norma.

"My dear child," said Ardis, taking her friend's rosy face between her white hands, "I really cannot consent to concern myself with other people's ideas and fancies. And now let us go to bed."

About ten o'clock the next morning Mr. Jack Surrey was walking up and down in the shade of some oak trees on the lawn at Bald Hill. He was smoking a cigarette, and was in radiant good-humor. This was due partly to his pleasant surroundings and partly to the fact that he had made up his mind. Mr. Surrey's intentions generally resembled the erratic flights of fire-flies upon a dark night. To concentrate these intentions into a glow sufficient to

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show him what he was going to do was very cheering to his soul.

In the course of that summer he had made up his mind to marry, and of the available ladies of his acquaintance he thought of none more favorably than of Miss Ardis Claverden. He had made her acquaintance during the past winter in Washington, and had seen her frequently; and the oftener he saw her the more he admired her. But he did not feel altogether sure about her. She might be a very fine lady in the city and yet live in a ramshackle sort of way in the country, at home, which would not at all suit him. There was a good deal of that sort of thing in Virginia. He had come down to see for himself how the land lay, and his good fortune had been fairly stunning. He had supposed he would be invited to take some meals at the Claverden place and perhaps to spend a night there, but to be asked to make Bald Hill his home during his stay in the neighborhood was far beyond his expectations. And Ardis at home was far beyond his expectations.

"By George!" he said to himself as he blew a line of smoke far out into the morning air, "she is more charming here than she is anywhere else! She is a regular young queen!"

And Bald Hill as a whole was satisfactory to Mr. Surrey. He was impressed by the air of comfort and prosperity about the place. To be sure it had none of that appearance of fresh paint, sand-papered grass and general bandboxism which one sees in the swell country places near a city, but there was nothing run-down here, no evidences of the wreck and ruin which are supposed to be the common results of the late war. It was apparently a well-kept and well-managed estate; and although the probable income from it, were the owner residing in New York, would have allowed him to do no more than live in

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a modest way and ride about in street-cars, yet here, Mr. Surrey thought, that income enabled him to live like a prince in comparison. Here were plenty of horses raised on the place and costing little to keep; plenty of servants at wages that seemed to Mr. Surrey like mere bagatelles; carriages; good living; plenty of room for company; and, better than all, only one child to inherit the whole thing.

He had just returned from a walk to the vineyard with Major Claverden, who had expatiated fully on the subject of the wine of Bald Hill. To the words of his host Mr. Surrey had listened with great interest. This was something gorgeous! He had sipped Johannisberger; and what a high old thing it would be to grow that glorious wine on your own place! The old gentleman spoke like a man who is master of his subject, and the subject was one of the deepest import to Mr. Surrey. He could see no reason why the finest juice in the world should not be produced on this spot. The hardest part of the work and the longest part of the waiting had already been done. It suited Mr. Surrey to join a race near the finish. The idea of one day drinking his own Johannisberger, or wine as good as that, was delightfully stimulating. He had asked a great many questions, and questions which Major Claverden thought very practical and sensible. He had even gone into the subject of bottling, and the branding of corks.

When they had returned to the house the major had informed his daughter that Mr. Surrey was the most intelligent and satisfactory visitor he had ever taken to his vineyard. "He appreciates the value of what I have done and what I am going to do, in a manner very unusual in a man who has never devoted himself to the pursuit of vine-growing. But his mind is capable of grasping

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promptly every detail, and what he does not know he is eager to ask."

This statement had greatly surprised Ardis. She had supposed that Mr. Surrey would be bored to death by a vineyard discourse; and that if he got through the ordeal with politeness it would be all that could be expected of him. His active interest appeared unnatural to her, and she must think about it. She made no reply to her father, but went to see what Norma was doing instead of going to see what Mr. Surrey was doing, as had been her intention.

The cigarette having been smoked, Mr. Surrey threw away the end, and expanded his broad chest. He stopped in his walk and gazed toward the house with an expression of cheery impatience.

"Now then, young lady," he said almost aloud, "come out, and be courted. If you don't come I shall go and look for you. But I prefer that you should make your appearance outside."

At that moment Mr. Surrey heard the sound of horse's hoofs on the driveway, not far behind him. Turning quickly he beheld approaching Dr. Lester on his cream-colored horse. A smile came over the face of Jack Surrey.

"What gay old cock is this?" he wondered.

Dr. Lester was loyal and true. He had promised Miss Ardis that he would call on the visitor at her house; and at the earliest suitable moment he had come. He would have much preferred to stay at home; but he thought of no such thing as staying at home. The moment he saw the smiling gentleman under the trees he disliked him; but nothing of that feeling was shown in his demeanor. He got down from his horse, and, bridle in hand, walked over the grass.

"This is Mr. Surrey, I presume," he said. "You must

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excuse, sir, the informality of my introducing myself in this way, but I am a friend of the family, of long standing. My name is Lester—Dr. Lester."

Mr. Surrey begged that informality be not mentioned, shook hands with the doctor, and said he was glad to see him.

"And now," thought Jack, "if he has come to see the old gentleman I hope he will step along and attend to that matter forthwith."

But Dr. Lester did not step along. He had come to pay his respects to Mr. Surrey, and he stood with him and asked him if he had ever visited this section of the country before; how it compared at this season with the more northern States; with similar remarks common on such occasions. Finally the two walked together toward the house, and the cream-colored horse was tied to the limb of a tree.

When Ardis heard Dr. Lester's voice on the porch she came out and joined the gentlemen. She was very glad to see the doctor. In a certain vague way he seemed a refuge to her. She was gracious and attentive to him in a manner that appeared somewhat pronounced, and which struck Mr. Surrey as being a little odd.

Presently the major came in from the farm, and Miss Norma made her appearance on the scene, and these two were also very gracious and attentive to the doctor. Mr. Surrey sat and observed. He could not exactly make out Dr. Lester, who was plainly a family friend, and who might also be supposed to be the family physician were it not that Mr. Surrey had never heard of a doctor whose regard for his business reputation would allow him to spend a morning in making a friendly call.

"If he has nothing to do," thought Jack, "it speaks well for the health of the country; and I like that."

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Mr. Surrey joined in the general conversation whenever he found himself able to do so, and very soon came to the opinion that Dr. Lester was a man who not only knew a good deal about a lot of things, but who had nothing very pressing to do, for he had allowed his horse to be taken to the stable and had consented to stay to dinner. Mr. Surrey, who could ill endure protracted sedentary conversation, went out after a time to the side porch to stretch his legs and to look at the sky. There was nothing the matter with the sky, and the legs stretched easily. And then he walked up and down with his thumbs in the sleeve-holes of his waistcoat and considered what he should do about Dr. Lester. It seemed impossible for him to carry on the business which he had marked out for himself in the morning, while that man was here. He therefore turned the matter over in his mind to see how he could make the best of present circumstances, this being one of his habitual mental exercises. He concluded that the very best thing to do about Dr. Lester was to stop playing second fiddle in conversations in which he took no particular interest, and to get some good for himself out of this doctor, who seemed to be well posted on a variety of subjects.

In pursuance of his determination, Mr. Surrey proposed to the doctor, soon after dinner, to take a walk with him, the major having been called away by his head man. In the course of a long walk, Mr. Surrey received a great deal of information which he mentally disposed of with aptness and good judgment, dropping that which appeared unavailable, and carefully storing away all which might be of future use. He asked questions about the manners and customs of the country, about the game, the peculiarities of the soil, the rates of farm wages, the methods of fertilizing, the system under which the roads were kept in

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repair, the grazing capacity of the country, and as many points connected with local politics as he was able to put into shape.

Dr. Lester replied with willing readiness to all the queries of his companion, but for the first time in his life, as far as he could remember, he took no pleasure in talking on the subjects which ordinarily interested him so much. The truth was that he took no interest in Mr. Surrey. He had promised Miss Ardis that he would do his best to help entertain this visitor to her father's house, and he had honestly endeavored to keep his promise. But the only information which he would cheerfully and gladly have given this gentleman would have been the hour of departure of the next train from Bolton for the North.

On the other hand, Mr. Surrey approved of the doctor. He was a queer specimen, so grave, so long, and so full of facts; but he had proved himself very serviceable. Mr. Surrey now felt confident that he could make a fair show in the general conversations which might take place at Bald Hill. He knew enough at any rate to ask intelligent questions, and that was very important. He had made the best of Dr. Lester, and was, therefore, satisfied with him. But he had no further need of him, and was glad, as they approached the house, to see a saddled horse standing by the hitching-post; probably in pursuance of orders left by the doctor.

But as they came nearer Surrey noticed that the horse was not a cream-colored one, but a very fine bay animal. Then he perceived upon the porch the two ladies, the major, and a gentleman. When he reached the house this individual, a tall, good-looking young man, was introduced to him as Mr. Dunworth. Jack Surrey did not care about Mr. Dunworth one way or the other, but he

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was very unpleasantly impressed by the fact that there were a great many more visitors at this Virginia country house than he had imagined there would be. In fact, in coming down here he had supposed that he would have the Miss Claverden field all to himself.

The doctor and Mr. Dunworth stayed to supper, and for some hours afterward, but the evening was not a very satisfactory one. The major, Norma, and Mr. Surrey talked a good deal, and the others listened a good deal. This listening, which was done by persons who were accustomed to take their full share of the talking, threw a certain air of constraint over the party.

About the family bed-time the doctor and Mr. Dunworth departed, and, as he was taking leave of Ardis, the latter found opportunity to say: "How long is that man going to stay here?"

"I don't know," she said, "and I don't think you ought to speak of our visitors in that way. I supposed you came here to help make his visit pleasant."

He smiled a little grimly. "To tell the truth," he said, "I came to see who and what he is. I do not like him."

"Roger Dunworth!" said Ardis, severely.

"Ardis," he replied, "you know very well what I mean. It is because of you that I care enough about him not to like him."

"You do very wrong," she said flushing, "to place me even in your own mind, in such positions in regard to other people."

And she did not give him her hand when he left.

Jack Surrey went to his room disappointed, but not at all disheartened. "The result of this interruption is," he said to himself, "that I shall not count this day as part of my visit. I shall begin fresh to-morrow."

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CHAPTER VIII.

ON the morrow Mr. Surrey thought it well to give some attention to the ostensible business which had brought him to Bolton. It was not according to Major Claverden's ideas of politeness to ask his visitor any questions concerning this business; and Surrey was not entirely prepared to give such information, had it been asked. Of course, had he been thrown among inquisitive people, he would have had an answer for them, but he was very glad that, so far, he had not been required to make any remarks on the subject. But appearances demanded of him that he should show a proper interest in this business, whatever it might be. And so, after breakfast, he borrowed a horse of the major, and rode into town.

In a general way Mr. Surrey had thought that if he should find it necessary to make known his business intentions, he would probably want to look over some papers in the office of the clerk of the county court. He knew Bolton was a county town, and supposed it had a county court with the appertaining clerk, but that said clerk had an office, or that there were any papers in the office, Mr. Surrey was not at all certain.

On the road to town he was in excellent spirits. He liked this country and this sort of life; he liked to ride to town on a good horse; he liked to think that he was coming back to spend the rest of the day, and he did not know how many more days, with such a wonderfully fine girl as Ardis Claverden. She would even suit him a great deal better than he had thought she would. She was a

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little quieter here than when he had met her in the city, but he liked that; it gave her a new charm. In fact he thought he should like that girl in any mood. To be sure he should prefer some moods to others, but she would appear well in any.

He did not ride fast, and his quick eyes glanced on every side. He wished to understand and appreciate what he saw, and he made conjectures as to the kind of grain which had been grown in this stubble field or in that. When he reached the bottom of a long hill he saw a man sitting on a fence by the roadside. The man's face was a good-humored one, and wore an expression half of inquisitiveness and half of recognition. Jack liked to talk to people whom he met in this way and he drew up his horse.

"Fine country you have about here," he said.

"Well," said the man, "in some ways you may call it fine, but in other ways it's different. But I suppose to people coming from the city, any kind of country looks mighty nice."

Mr. Surrey did not like this. Wherever he went he wished to be considered perfectly at home. He slightly shrugged his shoulders, but did not deign to explain to this casual stranger that he was quite familiar with all the different kinds of country that there were. He asserted himself, however, so far as to say that he had noticed the people hereabouts had made a great mistake in cutting down so many of their trees, especially on the high roads.

"Well," said the man on the fence, "some people have one kind of opinion about trees along the road, and some have another. Some like 'em and some don't. But, talkin' of trees, do you see that one, down there at the turn of the roads? Isn't that big and handsome?"

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"Yes," said Mr. Surrey, "that is a very fine tree."

"Well, now I'll tell you about that tree," said the man, settling himself more comfortably on his top rail. "Three years ago that tree was a weak, scragly, mean-looking thing. At that time there was a feller in these parts named Pete Creegle, who was a mighty big rascal, one of the worst kind. He made the people round here afraid to go to sleep at night. Sometimes he broke into houses and stole everything he could lay his hands on, and sometimes he'd murder a couple of old people to steal seven or eight dollars that they had put away somewhere, and sometimes he'd pour kerosene over a barn and set fire to it and burn up horses, mules and everything in it. He was caught two or three times, but he always got off some way or other; but he was grabbed up right in the middle of his last piece of rascality, and for fear he'd get off again, a party of good citizens took him and hanged him on that tree. Well, sir, from that minute that tree began to feel good. It looked as if it said to itself: 'Now I've been of some real downright service to this county. I've helped the people to get rid of Pete Creegle! I'll be durned if I don't believe I'm a good deal more of a tree than I thought I was.' And then that tree began to hump itself and put on airs. It just grew up and spread out till it got to be the big, handsome tree you see there! Now what do you think of that, sir, for a tree with a good opinion of itself?"

Jack Surrey was not at all averse to making a little good-natured game of a stranger, and when he had an opportunity he did not refrain from the sport. But he objected to any one making game of him. That sort of thing he would quickly resent. His eyes sparkled a little as he looked steadfastly at the man on the fence. "That was a good piece of work," said he, "and if people about

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here would plant trees all along the roads, and then hang on them the good-for-nothing, long-legged lazy rascals who sit about in the sun instead of trying to do something to earn their own victuals and soap, they would have the best-shaded roads to be found in this country!"

And with this Mr. Surrey rode slowly away.

As a general thing, Bonetti was a good-humored, pleasant-tempered man, but now all there was in him of Neapolitan blood came darkly into his face. Getting down from the fence, he went home.

Jack Surrey rode into town serene, happy, and ready to be interested. He entered the main street, and soon stopped in front of the principal hotel in the place. He gave his horse to a negro boy, taking it for granted that the boy would do for the animal whatever people did to horses on similar occasions. Whether he watered him, fed him, groomed him, or had him shod, the matter concerned not the mind of Mr. Surrey. He went into the hotel, bought a cigar, lighted it, came out upon the porch, took a seat in an arm-chair, put his feet up on the railing, and surveyed the passing scene.

The passing scene was very pleasing to Mr. Surrey. Although he sometimes spent a winter in Washington, he was not accustomed to Southern rural life; and all he saw was novel and interesting. The peculiar business life of the street exhibiting a certain bustling activity blended with a happy sense of leisure which gave every man time enough to talk to a friend without neglecting his affairs, seemed to Jack the beau ideal of what business life ought to be. It suited him.

"I should like to ride into town," he thought, "and sell corn and tobacco and wine to these good fellows. By George! I believe every man knows everybody else!"

A melancholy, half-grown ox between the shafts of a

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doleful cart, driven by a shriveled-up old negro man wearing a battered black silk hat, excited his delight.

"One couldn't see anything better than that at the theatre," he thought.

The negroes, men, women and children, entertained him much. Whether sailing along in finery, or slouching about in rags and old boots, they interested and amused him. A little negro boy, carrying a large basket, stopped and asked him if he wanted his boots blackened.

"Where are you going with that basket?" asked Mr. Surrey.

"I's gwine to de stoh fer groc'ri's," said he.

"And how are you going to blacken my boots?"

"Oh, I kin black 'em!" cried the boy, his eyes sparkling with mercenary expectation. "Dar's a boy down de hill wot'll len' me his blackin'-box. Jes' you keep you' eye on dat basket, boss, an' I'll run fotch de box."

"Look here, you young rascal," said Mr. Surrey, severely, "do you mean to say that when you are sent on errands you stop to go and borrow kits and black people's boots?"

"Yes, sah," said the boy, his eyes wide open with astonishment that any one should doubt his willingness to do such a praiseworthy deed as this.

"Well, get along, and attend to your business," said Mr. Surrey, "or I will teach you how to go on errands! Take that!" and he tossed him a coin which would have paid for the polishing of his boots.

Scarcely had the boy departed, grinning, when a high-pitched dog-cart, drawn by a headlong little horse, dashed up to the door, and a young man with rosy face, and dressed in a corduroy suit, sprang out. This individual hurried into the hotel, transacted his business there in a very few minutes, hurried out again, sprang into his dog-cart, and whirled himself away.

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"English!" thought Mr. Surrey. "Know them wherever I see them! Slam-bang, dog-cart, and whiskey."

Mr. Surrey was not averse to any of these things taken in moderation, but it amused him to see other people given to them. He now threw away the end of his cigar and walked up the street. Here he saw shops with a lot of things in them a man might want; in a window a display of cravats which prompted him to go in and buy one; a little farther on a boy in a stationer's store sawing in half a block of ice which he had just pulled up out of the cellar, and for which a customer with a basket was waiting.

"This is too jolly!" said Jack Surrey. "Pens, ink, and ice! I wonder if they keep pug pups in there! This sort of thing ought to be written up for the magazines. It would make a first-class illustrated article. I have a mind to do it myself. By George! I will do it! Happy thought! That is my business in this town! Confound the clerk of the county court! I'll have nothing to do with him! I will lay in a stock of tools and go straight to work."

And turning back, he went into the stationery shop and bought a pocket memorandum-book, pencils, a package of manuscript paper, a bottle of ink, some pens, and a portable inkstand. He then spent about half an hour talking with the proprietor of the establishment, from whom he extracted a variety of curious and interesting facts in regard to the town and the people.

Having now settled upon his business in Bolton, Jack was joyously satisfied. He returned to the hotel; called for his horse; remunerated the boy with a sum which was royal pay for having simply tied the animal to a post; and then rode back to Bald Hill.

"I cannot draw the pictures," he said to himself, as

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his horse, animated by visions of his noontide meal, cantered briskly homeward. "But that does not matter; I can have them made in New York. I can tell the artist exactly what to draw, and we shall get on well enough."

Major Claverden met him at the door. "I hope you have had satisfactory success in your affairs, sir," said his host with polite but uninquisitive interest.

"Oh, splendid!" said Mr. Surrey. "I have got a lot of capital points for the illustrated article I am going to write about Bolton. I had no idea your town, sir, was so full of good bits both for pen and pencil."

"I hope, sir," said the major, "if your business here is to write an account of our town and neighborhood for Northern readers, that you will give yourself ample opportunity to know us exactly as we are. That is all we desire, sir. But a great deal has been written by persons who made their observations in the most superficial manner which outrageously misrepresented us, sir."

"Oh, you needn't be afraid of anything of that kind in my case," said Jack. "I shall look long indeed into everything I write about, and I haven't any prejudices one way or another. And what is more, major, I shall not mind in the least letting you look over my manuscript before I print it; so that you may let me know if I have got anything crooked."

"That is very fair," said the major, "and I shall be glad to do so. Are you an artist, sir, as well as a writer?"

"No," said Jack, "and there is the rub! I do not draw, and I don't suppose I could find anybody about here who could make sketches for me. But that will make but little difference, for the pictures can be done from descriptions. That is common enough."

"My daughter, sir," said Major Claverden, "is an admirable artist, and I have no doubt that she will be able

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to furnish you with sketches which may be useful to you."

Mr. Surrey's eyes sparkled. "Good!" he exclaimed. "Nothing could be better than that! And I shall be delighted to avail myself of any assistance she may be willing to give me.

"Now then," thought Jack, as, when left to himself, he walked up and down the porch, "could anything be more glorious! She draws! I write! Pop!"

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CHAPTER IX.

ON the afternoon of that day Mr. Surrey walked up and down on the grass under the oak trees smoking his cigar. He had had his dinner; he was satisfied with all the world; and he was waiting for the appearance of Miss Claverden in order that he might discuss with her the subjects of the sketches for his article. He had not mentioned this matter at dinner, somewhat to his host's surprise, for the major thought when a man had anything as important as that to speak of, he would speak of it on the first opportunity. But as his guest made no allusion to the matter, he, of course, made none.

Jack Surrey valued too highly the opportunities which his proposed discussion might give him to waste any of them in desultory dinner talk. He wished to speak to Ardis alone, and as his cigar drew near its end he began to grow impatient for her appearance. He changed the direction of his walk so he could keep his eyes upon the piazza, porches, and open lower windows of the house. Norma Cranton came out on the side porch, and taking a shaded seat, began to work upon her rural scene on linen. Jack spoke cheerily to her, and presently joined her.

"Can you tell me," he said, "when Miss Claverden will be likely to make her appearance among us mortals? I, for one, am particularly anxious to see her. I wish to talk to her on business."

"Business!" exclaimed Norma, her eyes expressing astonishment.

"Yes, Miss Cranton," said Jack, lazily throwing him-

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self into a corner of a bench, "business. I don't suppose you look upon me as a business man, but I assure you that is what I am. And I do not mind," he continued, leaning a little forward as he spoke, "telling you what my business is. I believe it is a sort of thing which you will take an interest in; and in which you can help a man very much indeed."

Norma let her square of linen drop into her lap, and looked at him.

"I am going to collect as many good points as I can about life in your town and in this part of the country, and when I have taken all the notes I want, and have got a lot of sketches——"

"You are going to write a book for Northern readers," interrupted Norma, "making fun of the people of the South, especially of this region."

"Not at all, Miss Cranton! Not at all!" exclaimed Surrey. "I am not that sort of man, I assure you. Of course I shall bring forth all the odd and quaint characteristics, especially of the negroes and ordinary whites; but as to making fun of your people, I would not dream of such a thing, Miss Cranton."

Norma listened to Mr. Surrey's disclaimer, but his words made no impression upon her. "The books you Northern people write are all alike," she said. "You take what you call the quaint and peculiar characteristics of the negroes and low-down whites, and you put them forward in such a way that the readers of the books think that we are all like that. Now, I consider these traits of the working people as utterly beneath notice. And if you all were to write books which would give a true idea of life down here you would write of the ladies and gentlemen you associate with, and put everything else into the background where it belongs."

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"Really, Miss Cranton——" said Surrey. But he stopped speaking at the sound of approaching wheels, and the next instant a dog-cart pulled up at the front of the house and a fresh-faced young man, in a corduroy suit, sprang to the ground.

"Upon my word," said Mr. Surrey, "if there isn't the young Englishman I saw in town to-day."

"Yes," said Norma, "it is Mr. Prouter, and I don't believe there is anybody to receive him." And she went through the house to the front.

Mr. Surrey remained a few moments in the corner of the bench. "It must be business with the major that brings that fellow here," he muttered. Then, hearing voices, he got up and went inside. Through the open windows of the parlor he could look upon the front porch, and there he saw Prouter shaking hands with Ardis. "Confound it!" he said to himself. "She always makes her appearance as soon as any country Tom, Dick, or Harry arrives!"

Norma was already on the porch, where Major Claverden soon made his appearance. Surrey, not wishing to be left to himself, joined the group. He was made acquainted with Mr. Prouter, but the ceremony did not appear to afford him any gratification. Contrary to his usual manner, he was qui t and a little stiff. Mr. Surrey had no dislike for Englishmen. He had lived a good deal in London; and, as a rule, looked upon a Briton as a jolly good fellow. But he disliked this Englishman because he had thrust himself upon the scene at the moment when he was hoping for a tête-à-tête with Miss Claverden; and also because he looked so disgustingly delighted when that lady was shaking him by the hand.

It being very pleasant on the open porch, the party now took seats there, and Prouter instantly began to talk.

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"Do you know, Miss Claverden," he said, "that I am going into business? I have set up a milk route."

At this everybody exclaimed in astonishment. "It does sound queer, doesn't it, really?" said Prouter, his face glowing with ruddy fervor. "But that is what I have done. I vowed to myself I would not be the only man in this county with nothing to do. And so I set up a milk route."

Ardis and Norma were much amused by Mr. Prouter's statement, but the major was filled with grave surprise. "It appears to me, sir," he said, "that you could not have chosen a more unsuitable occupation."

"Beg pardon," said Prouter, "but if you look at it you will see that that is not the case. Anything better suited to me couldn't be imagined. I must gallop over the country looking for new cows when the old ones give out; I must ride here, there, and everywhere, buying hay, fodder, ensilage, and everything else that cattle eat or want; and I must keep on the go day and night, to see that the milkers and the feeders and the fellows that drive the wagons are kept up to their work and do no shillyshallying; and besides that, I've got to increase the line of customers, if I expect the thing to pay, and that will take a lot of going about town and seeing people; to say nothing of riding into Bolton every morning from Quantrill's—a good six miles—and back again at night. Now, that's lively, isn't it? And something out-and-out lively is what I want!"

"Do you mean, sir," said the major, "that you have already set up your route; that you have collected together everything necessary for such an enterprise?"

"I have not done anything of that sort," said Prouter. "I found that getting things together for myself would be too slow work, so I bought out Keyser, the milkman in

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Bolton; I've bought him out, root and branch, cows, milk-pans, stables, wagons, pitchforks, and everything. He hadn't much of a connection, for people didn't like his milk. But I am going to set up the whole business on a new basis. I'll get in a lot of tip-top cows, and shall have all the wagons painted, new and bright, with green bodies and red wheels; and in big letters on the side, 'Royal Blossom Meadow Milk.' That is the sort of stuff I am going to furnish! American customers won't object to the 'Royal,' and that part of the title will tickle the old-country people hereabouts. I shouldn't wonder if they'd all sell their Yankee cows and buy my milk. That's a tip-top bit of a touch now, isn't it? I don't suppose you want to take milk, do you, Miss Claverden?"

Ardis laughed. "We have a large herd of cows," she said, "and I hardly think we shall want any of the Royal Blossom Milk, though I wish you all success."

"Thank you for that," said he, "but I am going to send you some of the milk, anyway. You don't know what glorious milk-punch it makes! I took some of it out to Quantrill's last night in a little pail, and although most of it spilled over my legs, there was enough of it left to make some of the finest punch you ever tasted. Do you fancy milk-punch, sir?" said he, suddenly, turning toward Mr. Surrey.

"No, sir," said Surrey, promptly, and falsely.

"I've a great mind to send the punch ready-made," said Prouter.

"You must bring it yourself, sir," said the major, "but I would not advise you to set up a milk-punch route."

At this everybody laughed, except Mr. Surrey, and Prouter exclaimed: "I'll tell you, Miss Claverden, that when you want to sketch me again you must take me mounted, with a sombrero and a big cattle whip."

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"And a lot of milk-pails and churns in the background," added Ardis.

The conversation continued in this strain for some time, while Mr. Surrey looked on with silent disapproval.

"So Ardis Claverden sketched this fellow, did she?" And a more impertinent, red-faced puppy, Mr. Surrey thought he had never looked upon. He would like to pop him, head foremost, into one of his own milk-cans. "Why should he come here, thrusting his vulgar business into the notice of gentlemen and ladies?"

Upon one thing Mr. Surrey quickly made up his mind. To persons like Dr. Lester and Dunworth, who were evidently old friends of the family, he would be studiously courteous; but there was no reason why he should treat this little jackanapes with any respect whatever. Of course he would remember that this person was a visitor in a family where he was also a guest, and he would do nothing out of the way; but if he caught the little rascal interfering in his affair with Ardis Claverden, he would break his neck somewhere off the premises.

The whole party now walked out to the studio to look at Ardis' picture, which was nearly finished and was unanimously declared to be a capital painting, which, barring some defects of inexperience, it really was. Mr. Prouter, notwithstanding the demands of his new career, staid to supper, at which meal Dr. Lester was also present. The whole of the milk-route business was told again and retalked over, and similar things were done which excited Mr. Surrey's impatience and disgust. But at ten o'clock the two visitors left, and Surrey found an opportunity to have a private talk with Ardis. He put before her the subject of the sketches in a way which interested her. She had had no idea that he was a writer, and she was very willing to let him see all the sketches

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she had on hand, and to make more for him, if necessary. An interview in the studio was appointed for the next morning, and Jack went to bed greatly encouraged.

During the two following days there was a great deal of art discussion, and some art work, at Bald Hill. Ardis had sketch-books and portfolios filled with finished, half-finished, and barely begun heads, figures, log-cabins, and all sorts of characteristic "bits," all of which Mr. Surrey declared to be exactly what he wanted. Some of the drawings he could take just as they were and write up to—declaring that most of the illustrated articles of the day were constructed in that way—others could be furnished to suit his notes; and there was no end of the capital work they could do together.

These discussions were not confined to Ardis and Mr. Surrey; Norma was continually in and out of the studio, making suggestions which she hoped would elevate the general tone of the subjects taken. The major also showed a lively interest in the work, and assured Mr. Surrey that when he should reach that branch of his subject he would be ready to give him all needful points in regard to the great grape-growing interests of the locality, and would indicate some illustrations which would tend to give a peculiar value to his article.

Ardis made some original sketches from Mr. Surrey's suggestions and descriptions, and he declared that if she could get him some darkies, big and little, he could pose them so as to serve for all sorts of street subjects. Several negro boys and girls were sketched in attitudes considered characteristic; but the favorite model was Uncle Shad, the old ox-driver.

Uncle Shad had often sat to Ardis, sometimes as one thing, and sometimes as another. She had made a very good middle-aged Roman soldier of him, and there were

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several sketches on the studio walls in which he figured as venerable personages of the past. One of his greatest merits as a model was his perfect willingness to sit still for any length of time; and Ardis had often given the oxen a half holiday in order that their driver might have a chance of going down to posterity instead of the woodlands, where the winter's fuel was waiting to be hauled. The old man always wanted to know what he was "gwine to be drawed fer," but only on one occasion did he express a decided opinion on the subject.

"I does wish, Miss Ardis," he said, "that I wasn't most times drawed as a old heathen or a Cath'lic. Some ob dese days, Miss Ardis, when you feels mighty good, it would make my soul bounce wid joy ef you was to put me inter a picter like a pow'ful preacher standin' up stiff an' strong, on top of a big rock, wid a mighty voice 'spoundin' de word to a whole field full ob bred'ren an' sisters, wid Beelzebub skippin' ober de hills into de nex' county, whar dar wasn't no sich pow'ful preacher as me."

This proposed subject pleased the fancy of Ardis, who, when she put action into her pictures, liked it to be strong, and did not at all object if it proved erratic; and she resolved that some day she would paint a picture of this kind, and make a present of it to Uncle Shad. But this plan had not yet been carried out.

Mr. Surrey was very fond of posing Uncle Shad. He made him sit as a driver of "The Lonely Ox," and in other "character" attitudes. All this was very delightful to Jack Surrey. In the morning he galloped into town to get "points" for his article, but he did not waste any precious moments and was back by the time Ardis was ready to begin work in her studio. He would have been better pleased if Norma had not popped in and out so often, and if Ardis had not been so gravely intent upon

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her work. His attempts to lead the occasional tête-à-tête conversations into channels in the least degree tinged with sentimentality were always unsuccessful. She was willing enough to talk, but she preferred practical subjects.

She was not at all the animated, sprightly young lady he had met the winter before. There was, however, an encouraging construction which might be placed upon this present manner of Ardis. To Surrey's somewhat practised judgment it looked as if she were on her guard. If this were the case she suspected his ultimate object, and to do this she must think of him as a wooer, and to make the desired lady think of him as a wooer is a very advantageous first step for a man who intends to woo. The second step in which he should show himself to be a wooer, Jack intended to take very soon. If opportunity did not come of itself he would make it; that was his fashion.

A remark by Norma one evening to the effect that she did not object to this sketching business as much as she thought she should, because Ardis was so careful to let Mr. Surrey see that all this was art work, and nothing else, set Ardis thinking.

She had begun to feel that she was not acting in accordance with her nature. She was not in the habit of treating any man, with whom she chose to associate, with coolness and caution. To do this was to make him an exception, and it was highly desirable that Mr. Surrey should not consider that anybody else considered it necessary to make of him an exception in this way. It was natural for her to be gay and free, and there was no reason why Mr. Surrey should interfere with this disposition, or imagine he was interfering with it.

Before she slept that night she determined that she would be perfectly natural and treat Mr. Surrey just as she treated other men of her acquaintance.

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CHAPTER X.

ON the evening of the next day, Roger Dunworth rode up to Bald Hill, and after supper Ardis took him aside.

"Roger," said she—they had been boy and girl together, and called each other by their Christian names—"I want you to join a party to go to the Ridgeby Caves."

"Who are to be in the party?" asked Dunworth quickly.

"It is made up principally for Mr. Surrey. He is writing an article about this part of the country, and ought, certainly, to see the caves. Dr. Lester is going; and he has promised to see Mr. Prouter, who will join us, I know; and the Dalrymples. They were here this morning and I asked them. At first Mrs. Dalrymple did not agree, but when she had heard something of the wonders of the caves, she said she and her daughter would go. Norma and I will, of course, be of the party, but I think that father will not care to join us."

"Nor shall I," said Dunworth.

"Don't say that," said Ardis. "I want you to go. It will be ever so much pleasanter for all of us if you are with us. So, tell me at once that you will join us!"

"Ardis," said Roger, speaking very earnestly, "I shall not join any party of which that man Surrey is one. I tell you plainly that I do not like him, and do not wish to associate with him. And, what is more, Ardis, I shall be very, very sorry to know that you have gone on this expedition. You will be gone three days!"

"I know that," said Ardis, "for I have twice made the

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trip, and the two nights in the old tavern are a great part of the fun."

Roger did not immediately reply, but presently he said: "Of course the only thing I object to is that Surrey is to be of the party."

"And what right have you," asked Ardis, quietly, "to object at all? I simply invite you to join a party which is already formed."

"Ardis," said Roger, his voice not altogether steady, so earnestly did he speak, "I am sure you know why I object. I object because I love you, and because it gives me a pain at my heart to think that you are willing to go off on this three-days' expedition which Surrey cares nothing about except that it will give him no end of opportunities of being with you. He is utterly unworthy of you, and yet he has come down here for no other object than to try to win you."

"Roger Dunworth," said Ardis, fixing her dark eyes earnestly upon him, "I want you to understand me better than you do. I wish no one to speak to me of love, and I forbid you to do it. If any one else attempts to do it, I shall forbid him. I shall say no more to you about my objects in life, or my ambitions, because you do not believe in them; but I wish, for years to come, to be entirely independent of all men, except my father. And that wish ought to be sufficient for all who respect me, or care for me. I have already explained this to you, but it seems to have had no effect. I told you that I would not consider what you said to me, and that you should be to me exactly what you were before you said it."

"Which is an impossibility!" murmured Roger.

"Now this," continued Ardis, paying no attention to the interruption, "is the utmost stretch of kindness, which, under the circumstances, a woman could extend toward a

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man. But you take no notice of my desires, or of my good feeling, and come to me on the footing on which you choose to stand, and make objections to my plans for entertaining myself and my friends. Now I say to you, Roger Dunworth, that I wish this stopped."

"It shall be stopped," said Roger. And he went away.

Contrary to Dunworth's suppositions, the proposed trip to the Ridgeby Caves was not altogether acceptable to Mr. Surrey. He had been perfectly satisfied with the way things had been going on in the studio, and was quite sure that in a day or two he could there find, or make, the opportunity he wished for. But this expedition might interfere with his purposes. There would be a good many people together, and the chances for his monopoly of Ardis would be small. If he could have managed things his own way he would have had the entrance to the caves covered by a landslide; but he saw that it would be unwise in him to object to a scheme proposed for the pleasure of a large party, and he said nothing against it.

On the morning on which the expedition was to start, when baskets and valises were being packed; when the men were putting horses to the family carriage and to a light wagon, and other horses were being saddled; when guests were arriving, and all the varied preparations for the expedition were making, Jack Surrey sauntered off by himself. His valise had been packed in five minutes, and as Ardis was so extremely busy the house possessed no attractions for him. He walked off toward the studio.

"Confound it!" he said to himself as he looked upon the quiet old building, "I ought to be in there with her now, instead of gadding off on this stupid picnic! And there is our old model! He must work all day at hauling wood instead of sitting at his ease having himself immor-

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talized! Hello! Uncle Shad! This is a wicked world, isn't it?"

The old negro stopped on his way to the woodhouse where his ox wagon was standing, touched his hat, and answered: "Yes, sah, it's a pow'ful wicked worl'; but 'tain't no wuss than 'twas yestidd'y, is it, sah?"

"Yes, it is," said Surrey, "at least it is worse than it was two or three days ago. But that is out of your bailiwick, Uncle Shad. And, by the way, how did you come by such a name? You couldn't have had an ancestor who was a fish, and I don't suppose you could now be considered a part of the net proceeds of this farm."

"Dat 'spression's too deep fer my understandin', Mister Surrey," said the old man, "but it's easy enough to tell you all about de name. My mudder, she sez, sez she, to the preacher wot mahr'ed her, 'I's so thankful fer de blessin's I's got dar I's gwine to name my fust three boy babies after de chillun ob Isr'el wot was froun into de fiery funniss.' An' when I was bawn she name me Shadrach, but de udder culled people made a deal ob fun ob dat name, an' when Meshech come she call him Granville, an' Abednego he was name Jake."

"Shadrach," said Mr. Surrey, "I am sorry you are obliged to remain in the fiery furnace while your two brothers skipped out, but if half a dollar will be of any use in making amends for your fishy abbreviation, take that. And now tell me: Is it necessary for you to haul wood for the next three days?"

Uncle Shad looked up, a little surprised. "It's nes'sary to wu'k; ef 'tain't one thing it's anudder. I's to haul wood fer de winter, an' ef I don't haul it to-day I hauls it to-morrer, an' I keeps on till I gits a good deal more'n enough, an' den I stops."

"Very good," said Mr. Surrey. "I think I can find

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you something to do for a few days which will be more profitable to a party I know than hauling winter wood." And walking quickly to the house, he proposed to Miss Claverden that Uncle Shad should go with them to the caves, to make himself generally useful and to act as model when needed.

"You see," said the considerate Jack, "that if we come across any good 'bits' in those caves it will be a capital thing to have Uncle Shad along to put into the sketch in any sort of character that we may think is needed. You can't depend on volunteer models."

Ardis was to be one of the riders, and in her close-fitting habit and riding cap she seemed to Surrey handsomer than he had ever before seen her. "Mr. Surrey," said she, leaning against one side of the open doorway, her arms folded and her riding whip dangling from one of her gloved hands, "you have entirely too much foresight for this part of the country. Down here, when we go off on a trip like this it never occurs to us to take with us models in addition to our provisions and extra wraps. We would as soon think of carrying a piano or an encyclopedia. And what is more, sir, I wish it understood that I am not going on this little excursion to draw or to work in any way. I am going for pure amusement, and I shall leave my paper, pencils, and models at home. Now don't you think that will be sensible?"

Mr. Surrey felt obliged to say that he supposed it would be, and at that moment Ardis was called away by an urgent summons from Norma. When she left him, she smiled, "I should not have imagined that he would propose such a transparent scheme for dividing the party!"

Norma's summons was a very important one. A message had just arrived from Mrs. Dalrymple that in consequence of the unexpected return of her son from a long

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journey, she and her family would not be able to join the expedition to the Ridgeby Caves. This was a disastrous blow. Without a matron how could there be a party?

"It is just like that woman!" exclaimed Norma. "I have only seen her once, but I know her through and through. She agreed to go because it gave her importance, and now, after we have taken all the trouble to get everything ready, she steps back simply for the pleasure of crushing us."

"Of course," said Ardis, "this settles it."

"Of course it does," said Norma, "and we may as well go out and tell them to scatter to their homes."

Dr. Lester was now on the porch with Mr. Surrey and the major; and Tom Prouter, accompanied by Mr. Cruppledean, had just ridden up. Jack Surrey was the only one of the gentlemen who received the news with equanimity. He was perfectly satisfied to substitute studio experiences for those of a mountain expedition. Major Claverden was decidedly angry, but he expressed himself with moderation.

"This conduct surprises me," he said. "Did she not know that her action totally subverts the purposes and pleasures of a large party? And could she not have brought her son with her? Did she suppose he would not be made welcome as one of her family?" And unable to say more without committing what he would consider a breach of decorum, he retired to the library, where he walked up and down in silence.

Dr. Lester was indignant that a plan proposed and desired by Miss Ardis should be interfered with; and Mr. Cruppledean, who had come prepared to enjoy a jolly jaunt, was downcast to find that the opportunity was taken away from him.

But Tom Prouter was rebellious. By dint of the deep-

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est thought and wildest exertion he had given himself a three-days' holiday. He had hired a substitute, with orders to ride about the country and look at milch cows; to see that the men were at work early and late; to overlook the systematic delivery of the milk; to dash here and there and everywhere with a big cattle whip in his hand and his mind full of pans, cans, ensilage, and pasture. He was not going to give up the good time he expected without a struggle.

"I wouldn't stand it, Miss Claverden," he said, "if I were you! I would not let a person like that say whether I should go on an excursion or not. Now let me tell you, if you really think it is necessary to have an elderly party along to keep us quiet, I'll provide one. I'll go fetch Miss Airpenny. She is old enough to have been dug up with the Pharaohs. She hasn't started on her journey yet because her money hasn't come from home. And this sort of trip will be just the thing to keep her from grumbling. She'll jump at it! May I go for her, Miss Claverden? I can ride to Loch Levin in half an hour and back in the same time. And giving her fifteen minutes to get ready, I'll have her here in an hour and a quarter."

This proposition was discussed by the company, although Surrey did not say much. Norma was in favor of inviting Miss Airpenny; she had never seen her, and greatly desired to do so. Ardis reflected a little before speaking. She had proposed this expedition partly for the Dalrymples. She was not greatly interested in this family, but they were newcomers, had never seen the caves, and her generous disposition prompted her to invite them to go there. She was, however, very willing to go herself, and to relieve the party from the disappointment which they evidently felt. And so, after a few words with her father, she consented to Mr. Prouter's plan.

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"I do not expect you back in an hour and a quarter," she said. "We shall have an early dinner, and as the moon is nearly full, it will not matter if we arrive at Purley's Tavern a little late."

The words were scarcely out of her mouth when Prouter was down the steps, on his horse, and off at a mad gallop. Ardis had intended to send Miss Airpenny a formal invitation, but no time had been given her.

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CHAPTER XI.

THE early dinner was nearly ready when Cruppledean, who was smoking his pipe under the trees, suddenly shouted: "Hi! they are coming!" And in a moment after Prouter and Miss Airpenny cantered up to the house. The appearance of the lady was calculated to excite attention. She was somewhere between forty and sixty years of age; wore a man's felt hat, with her fluffy brown hair flying out from beneath it and flapping around her ruddy, weather-beaten face, and was dressed in a reddish-brown riding habit, very long in the skirt and fastened around her capacious form in such a way as to give her the appearance of two large brown bags. She rode a big horse on a hard canter, and bounced up and down in a way that made observers wonder how she kept her seat. Before assistance could reach her she dismounted, and came forward with quick and vigorous steps. She accepted with evident gratification the welcome given her by Major Claverden and his daughter, and gave everybody present an energetic hand-shake.

"Now, really," said she, her quick blue eyes moving from one member of the party to another, "I am very pleased that you sent Mr. Prouter to fetch me. I want to see those Ridgeby Caves, and I should have gone there before, but the people told me that no woman ought to ride as far as that and back by herself, though I am sure it must be an odd sort of country where I can't do that."

Soon after dinner the party started off, Miss Airpenny on her big horse, for when it was possible for her to walk

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or ride she disdained a carriage. Norma and Dr. Lester had the carriage to themselves the greater part of the time, although toward evening they were joined by Ardis and Mr. Surrey; the latter having been tired of riding some time before he changed his saddle for the carriage seat.

They arrived at the tavern, half-way up the mountain side, before the light of the moon was really needed to show them their way, and as Purley was always expecting parties of this kind, a hot and plentiful supper was soon ready for them.

Ardis was in a gay and genial mood. Her healthy soul and body liked this wild country, where even the houses were full of the air of out-of-doors. She liked Miss Airpenny too, that hearty, rough rider, who showed such an energetic delight in the excursion.

When they first set out, Ardis had been quieter than was her wont. Two things had weighed a little on her spirits. One was Roger Dunworth's behavior. Heretofore an excursion of this kind without Roger Dunworth would have seemed impossible. He was always looked upon as a leader, and if a time proposed did not suit his convenience the affair was postponed. His absence, and more than that, the cause of it, could not fail to be disquieting. The other weight was a lighter one. She fancied that Mr. Surrey would like to take advantage of this expedition to establish a closer intimacy between them than she had any desire for; and, while her natural intrepidity of spirit forbade any fear that she would not be able to regulate her intercourse with Mr. Surrey to suit herself, she disliked the idea that any such regulation would be necessary.

But the invigorating air of the mountain and the inspiriting motion of her sprightly mare had soon driven all

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depression from her mind; and when the evening grew a little chilly at the setting of the sun and she entered the carriage, she was as gay-hearted a girl as ever laughed on mountain side.

The night was cool, and the party gathered around the wood fire in the tavern parlor, and told stories. Dr. Lester related curious facts which had come within his reading or his observation. Miss Airpenny told a thrilling tale of how she had once been nearly precipitated by the pressure of an inquisitive crowd of tourists into the arms of a reigning sovereign. Norma told of an old lady in a gray shawl, with long finger bones coming out of the ends of black mittens, who was supposed to be a Maria Lumsley, who married a Cranton near the end of the last century. This ancestor regularly appeared in an upper unused room at Heatherley toward evening on a certain day in November, but as the particular date had been forgotten, Norma declared she never went into that room in the month of November, and if any others of the family had happened into that room on that particular day they had never mentioned it. Mr. Surrey related with admirable effect a humorous tale; and Ardis, at Norma's request, related a little romance she had composed some time before. It was a story of the Civil War; and its heroine was a Southern woman who had a married sister in the North. The husband of this sister, at the head of troops, came and ravaged the estate of the heroine, who, being of a proud and haughty spirit, disdained to curry favor of the enemy by revealing her identity, and saw her crops destroyed and buildings burned without allowing the officer conducting the devastation to know that she was his wife's sister.

"That is the kind of woman I like!" said Norma with sparkling eyes. "That is true patriotism!"

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"I do not feel so sure," said Ardis, "as when I wrote the story, that she did right. I think she ought to have considered her sister's feelings as well as her own."

"For my part," said Miss Airpenny, "I think she was an arrant fool. If such a woman had really existed I should say that she should have had a riding whip applied to her back for neglecting to take care of her husband's property while he was away doing his duty in the war."

Dr. Lester stood up warmly for the heroine, as he would have stood up for any heroine created by Miss Ardis.

The discussion which followed was ended by Ardis, who declared that Mr. Prouter and Mr. Cruppledean must each tell a story without further delay. For half an hour Cruppledean had been revolving in his mind a tradition of an old family ghost which he thought would be a good thing to tell when his turn came; but being thus suddenly called upon, the whole story, ghost and all, utterly vanished from his mind; and he was obliged to admit that he had nothing to tell.

Prouter, on the contrary, was quite ready. With an air of briskness and alacrity he moved himself forward to the edge of his chair, sat up very straight, put one hand on each knee, and with sparkling eyes and glowing cheeks began to tell an anecdote of a farmer of Fligwich who exchanged two pigs for a setting goose, and by the virtue of this bargain became the possessor of a little parlor organ which he gave to the dissenting chapel which he attended. Just how the bargain happened to turn out in this way, Mr. Prouter could not state, having forgotten some of the points; but it struck him as being extraordinarily odd, and he laughed immensely as he told the story.

At the conclusion of this lively story, which truly amused everybody, the party retired to their rooms.

Dr. Lester went to sleep a happy man. He had been

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all day with Ardis; and that was sufficient for him. Mr. Surrey retired dissatisfied. He had been all day with Ardis; but that was not sufficient for him.

Prouter and Cruppledean had beds in the same room. "Cruppledean," said the former, just before putting his head on his pillow, "did you ever in your life see a girl like that? Do you believe it would be possible to induce her to marry a man who sold milk?"

"No," said Cruppledean, "I don't. And what is more I don't believe she would marry you, no matter what you sold, nor what you did do, nor what you didn't do!"

"Really?" said Prouter.

"Yes, really," was the answer.

"Cruppledean," said Prouter, "you can put out the light." And he dropped his head on the pillow and pulled up the bed coverings.

After an early breakfast the next morning a lively company, under the charge of Purley and another guide, set out to explore the Ridgeby Caves. A walk of half a mile brought them to the entrance of the extensive and partially unexplored caverns which ran into the side and down into the depths of the low mountain range to which they had travelled the day before.

There was much to be seen here in the way of winding passages, unfathomable ravines, and chambers large and small, high-domed or low-roofed; all hung and adorned with stalactites and strange and curious formations, which water, dripping for long ages through porous soil, had produced in fantastic profusion. They wandered for hours, all the party interested, and Miss Airpenny filled with enthusiastic desire to guide the guides. In a great circular room, from the ceiling of which hung a massive structure, which, by the aid of lights and a little imagination, might be made into a very good chandelier, they

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ate the refreshments they had brought with them. Then they set out on their return.

Jack Surrey had been in a well-satisfied mood during their progress through the devious windings and openings of the caves. He had explored caves before, but this one possessed some novel features. The merry companionship was exactly to Mr. Jack's liking. To be sure he would have been much better pleased to do the greater part of the wandering with Ardis only, but this, of course, was impossible, and he was obliged to content himself with a share in the general gayety in which he became a leader.

But when he heard that in returning the party would retrace the route by which they had traversed the caves, he was dissatisfied. Going back over the same road was not a thing that suited him. He urged the guides to take them back some other way, but they declared no other route had yet been opened. Surrey was therefore compelled to go with the rest of the party over the same ground they had travelled before; but he lagged behind, with his candle, looking into dark openings to the right or left, and resolving to call the company back if he found anything novel. He saw nothing, however, of any importance; but when they were not very far from the entrance to the caves he remembered a large opening which they had passed shortly after coming in, and about which he had spoken to Purley, who told him that it was too full of obstructions to admit of the entrance of a party.

Jack was not easily deterred by obstructions when he wanted to do anything, and he determined to take a look into this opening. So he fell back, considerably behind the others; and when he reached the yawning aperture, which he well remembered, he quietly slipped into it. There was no danger that he would lose his way when he

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came out, for he could see at a distance the bright twinkle of the lantern which stood at the bottom of the steps which led up to the entrance to the caves.

Holding up his candle, Surrey could see that he was in a large cavern, the floor of which was tolerably smooth, and where the only obstacles to his progress were the great, pointed stalactites which hung down from the low roof. With a light, however, it was easy to avoid these; and he went on a short distance, until he came to an opening on the right which led into another cave, at the entrance to which lay some rough blocks of stone. Stepping over these, he entered the second cave; and, raising his candle, looked about him. He was in a rocky chamber very like the other except that the roof was higher and there did not seem to be so many stalactites. Some of these, however, were very long, and hung low. He was about to step forward to discover, if possible, the extent of this cavern, when, suddenly, something dark appeared at his shoulder, and instantly his light was blown out.

With an exclamation Surrey turned quickly; but all was black about him; such wall-like darkness he had never imagined. But he had little time to think of this, for, in the next instant, he received a powerful blow on the side of his neck, almost instantly followed by another in the back of his head. With a quick turn Surrey stretched out his arms, and grappled something. At the first touch of this something Surrey fancied that he had hold of a huge reptile, for it was cold and smooth and damp; but another blow delivered on his breast and his instant seizure of the arm which gave it, assured him that he had a man to deal with.

Surrey was strong, brave, and a first-rate boxer. Surprise had given way to anger, and with a muttered curse he sent a heavy right-hand blow at the man he held.

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There was no time for expostulation or even outcry, for the man now closed with him and endeavored to throw him to the ground. This, with a tough fellow like Surrey, was no easy matter, and the ensuing struggle became a violent one; in the midst of which Surrey remembered that his greatest danger might result from striking one of the stalactites which hung from the roof. He, therefore, endeavored to throw the man, in order that the fight might be continued on the ground, but his assailant was wiry and agile, and evidently wore no shoes—for his feet made no sound on the ground—and this gave him an advantage over Surrey on the wet and slippery floor.

The next instant proved that Surrey's fears were well founded, for the two struck together against a great stalactite with such force that they broke it off, and it fell with a thud that shook the ground. "Now down we must go!" thought Surrey—for he knew that if his head had struck that stalactite it would have been all over with him—and by a tremendous effort he lifted his antagonist a few inches, giving him at the same time a sudden twist. The man lost his footing but retained his vigorous clutch on Surrey, and the two fell heavily to the ground.

Surrey now had but one thought, and that was to kill the man, or devil, or whatever it was, who had attacked him in this atrocious and dastardly way. But his assailant was difficult to kill. Blow after blow Jack poured in upon him as they struggled on the floor, but blow after blow he received from the mute and furious being with whom he strove. Once he thought he heard voices, but he had no breath with which to call out. All his powers were required to keep his savage enemy from getting the better of him.

They rolled upon the floor, sometimes one uppermost, sometimes the other, but Surrey never tried to rise, for

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fear of the stalactites. On the wet and slime of the floor he knew that he must finish the fight. And there he finished it. By a sudden and powerful effort he put himself on his knees with the man beneath him, and from this advantageous position he dealt several quick and heavy blows upon the body of his foe. At this the man released his hold upon him, and by a quick roll jerked himself loose from Surrey's grasp, and slipped away, like a snake, into the blackness.

Surrey remained on his knees, panting for breath. He had not killed the villain. Would he attack him again? He remained motionless and listened, but not so much as the pat of a bare foot upon the floor could he hear. He knew not how long he had retained this position, when he felt that he was getting weak and that he must lose no time in making his way out of this place.

Surrey had been in serious plights before this day, and was accustomed to quick thinking. He remembered that he had made but few steps into this second chamber when he had stopped to look about him. In the struggle which had followed the extinguishment of the light it was not probable that he had moved very far from the place where he had stopped. His greatest difficulty, therefore, would be to discover which way he must go in order to reach the opening between the second cave and the first. His greatest danger was that his assailant, having recovered a little breath and vigor, might attack him again; and this time, perhaps, with a weapon. The striking of a match and the search for his candle would betray his position to the other; but this he determined to risk. The rascal was probably as badly used up as he was, and no matter what might happen, he must try to get out of this place.

He felt for his match-box, but found that part of the skirt of his coat containing the pocket with the matches

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in it had been torn off in the combat. He felt around him in every direction, but could not discover it. There was nothing now to be done but to find the opening without a light. He must grope for a few yards in a straight line from the spot where he knelt, and then endeavor to move sidewise without increasing his distance from the central point from which he started. If he could do this, he thought he must reach the opening of the chamber. Should he encounter his enemy he must do his best. There was no use in thinking any more about that contingency.

On his hands and knees Surrey crept forward for about twenty feet; then he put up his hand to feel before him, but touched nothing. Moving sidewise, and trying not to go either backward or forward, he was touched on the shoulder by a sharp point, and he suddenly shrank back as from the knife of a foe, but putting out his hand he found that this was a stalactite which reached down to within a short distance of the floor. Passing this he soon found himself among other stalactites, close together, and cold and hard, like great javelins ready to drop upon him in the blackness. He knew that he had passed through no such obstructions as these, and so, backing a little, he continued to move in a sidelong direction.

Several times he crept forward and stretched out his arm, but touched nothing. Then he receded a little, and endeavored to keep on in his circular course. Presently, in putting out his hand, he touched what seemed to be an upright rock. Rising cautiously to his feet, with his hand over his head to protect himself from down-reaching points, he found that he was in front of a rough wall. Moving slowly along this, with his hands upon its surface, he soon came to a break in it. Reaching downward he felt a line of low rocks a foot or two in height, and his

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heart leaped with joy. This he believed was a slight wall over which he had stepped when entering this second chamber.

Clambering over this wall, Surrey felt sure he was in the cave he had first entered when he left the main passage. He remembered that he had turned to his right in order to go into the second chamber, and he, therefore, began immediately to make his way toward the left. The stalactites in this cave hung lower than in the second one, and on this account he was afraid to walk upright, and proceeded on his hands and knees. Frequently his course was impeded by strong bars coming down from the roof or up from the floor, but he guarded his head as well as he could, and moved slowly. Sometimes the stalactites hung so close together that he knew he must be out of the path he had taken when he passed through the cave with his light. He would then slightly alter his course.

He groped on, he knew not how long nor how far, until at last, meeting with no more stalactites, he was seized by a sudden fear that perhaps he had got into a place where he had never been before; and, for the first time, a chill of terror passed through him. As long as he could imagine the place where he was from having been in it, his courage stood by him, but this horrible emptiness of blackness bewildered him, and he was afraid. He raised his head, and called out at the top of his voice. Up to this time he had made no outcry. His reason had told him that if his party were near enough to hear him he would hear them, and throughout his whole progress through the darkness he had endeavored to move so quietly that no sound made by him should enable his assailant to follow him.

Now he forgot everything and called out, but his voice sounded muffled and weak.

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What help could he expect from a call like that? Nervously trembling, and unwilling to move an inch forward, he turned completely about, and there, before his eyes but far away, he saw a twinkle of light.

He felt the glad blood rushing to his face. Now he knew where he was. He had actually made his way into the main passage, but had been moving in the wrong direction. He rose to his feet, and with arms stretched before him, and his eyes fixed upon the light, he stepped forward as rapidly as possible. That twinkling lantern in the distance simply indicated its own position; it shed no light upon his path. Sometimes he stumbled against the wall on one side, and sometimes he struck it on the other; now the footway was smooth; and then he found it rough and jagged. But with his eyes on the light he kept straight on.

He began to be very tired, and again he called out, but his voice seemed to penetrate only a yard or two. He walked on, though much slower than at first, until he reached the lantern and the bottom of the steep steps that led up to the little house built over the entrance to the caves. For a minute or two he sat upon the bottom step to rest, and then, on his hands and feet, he clambered up. He reached the top of the stairway, and staggered to the open door of the house. The day was cool for the season and the afternoon was well advanced, but coming from the low temperature of the caves, it seemed to Surrey as if he had stepped into the hot air of a furnace, and he gasped for breath.

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CHAPTER XII.

SCARCELY had he made a step from the door of the little house, scarcely had he taken a breath of the outer air which seemed to him so suffocating, when Jack Surrey heard sudden cries from female voices, and turning, he saw Ardis and Norma sitting under the shade of a tree. Instantly the two girls arose and ran toward him.

"Mr. Surrey!" exclaimed Ardis, "what is the matter with you? Where have you been?"

Surrey presented good cause for amazement. His face was pallid and smeared with dirt; his clothes were torn and covered with dingy white slime from the floor of the cave; his form was trembling as he stood; and, worse than all, from his left arm, from which the coat sleeve was nearly torn away, blood came dripping down, drop by drop, upon the ground.

Norma shrieked. "He is bleeding!" she cried.

Surrey smiled a weak, faint smile. "I have had a rough time," he said. "Tell you about it after awhile. Didn't know I was cut. I must sit down."

"He is faint!" said Ardis. "Norma, is there any water?"

Norma dashed into the little house. There was a pitcher on a table, but it was empty. She seized it and came running out. She stopped for a moment, looking about her. "There must be water down the hill," she said. "I will get some;" and away she ran.

Surrey sat down at the foot of a tree, his back against the trunk. Ardis took out her handkerchief, and ap-

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proached him. Her face was full of pity, but she asked no questions.

"Let me tie up the cut," she said. "It must not be allowed to bleed in that way."

Surrey looked at his arm. The lower part of the shirt sleeve had been torn away, and a few inches above his wrist there was a jagged wound which had no doubt been cut by a sharp stone in the course of the mad struggle in the cave. "I wondered why I felt so weak," he said. "It wasn't natural. Please tie it up."

Ardis felt a sort of dread coming over her. Mr. Surrey looked so pale and so wonderfully changed from the robust man who had gone into the caves, that she thought he must have been bleeding for a long time, and might die before her eyes. But this feeling did not cause her to hesitate an instant. Kneeling down beside him, she prepared to put her handkerchief around his arm.

"Twist it up," said Surrey, "and tie it below the cut. It's a vein."

Ardis did as she was directed. By Surrey's wish she pulled it tight with all her force, and tied it in a hard knot.

"Where are all the people?" asked Surrey. His voice was low, and he spoke in short sentences, but his desire to talk had not left him.

"They have gone to look for you," said Ardis. "Everybody went but Norma and me. Mr. Purley thought you had taken a path a long way back which looks very much like the proper passage, but which leads to some deep place or other. He did not want any woman to go, but Miss Airpenny would not be turned back. She said you might need a nurse. I wish she were here! I really believe that place is bleeding as badly as ever!"

Surrey did not wish Miss Airpenny were there, but he forbore from saying so. He turned his eyes from Ardis

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to his arm. "That is so," he said. "The ligature does not press the vein. If you would put your thumb on it I think you might stop the bleeding until some one comes."

Ardis did not think that perhaps he had strength enough to put his own thumb on the vein, but pulling down the useless handkerchief she clasped his arm with her right hand, and placed her thumb here and there until she put it over the vein and saw that the pressure stopped the flow of blood.

Kneeling thus by the half-prostrate man, and holding his wrist in her hand, she looked from side to side, and listened. Oh, that somebody would come! At any moment he might swoon, or even die before her!

Surrey felt very much exhausted, but his position was a restful one to his body and a most animating one to his mind. Here was the beautiful woman he loved, kneeling by his side, checking the flow of his life blood with her soft hand, and her lovely eyes filled with pity and anxiety for him. And, better than all, she was here alone with him.

It would have been difficult to find any man, except Surrey, who would have thought this a fitting moment in which to declare his affection for the woman who was thus ministering to him in his sad condition. Few men would have considered themselves able in such a case to speak their minds; and fewer still would have dared to presume upon the opportunity. But Surrey generally felt himself able to do what he wanted to do; and as for daring, that was a part of his nature. This was one of the chances to speak with Ardis which he had been hoping for; and, indeed, better than anything he had hoped for, for it was plain enough that her thoughts were fixed earnestly on him.

"Ardis," said he, "for a long time I have worshipped

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you as an angel, and it seems so fitting that it should be you who are with me now. You are my angel! Dear love, will you not be always that? Will you not be my wife?"

The blood rushed into the face of Ardis. Anger, astonishment, contempt, and even horror, struggled within her. She made a motion as if to spring to her feet, and then suddenly remembered that if she released her hold on that man's wrist his remaining blood might ebb from him and leave him dead before her! It was so absolutely necessary to stop the bleeding that even now she would not remove her hand. To upbraid this pallid sufferer, perhaps upon the verge of death, was impossible! To say anything was impossible! Oh, that some one would come! that some one would come! Her face, her whole body, seemed on fire.

Her silence emboldened Surrey. "Will you not speak to me, my love?" he said. And slowly raising his right hand he extended it toward her. She was about to tell him that if he touched her she would drop his arm and let him bleed, when she heard the sound of horse's hoofs upon the stony road near by; and in a moment around a clump of bushes, not a hundred feet away, there came a mounted man. With joy in her eyes Ardis recognized Roger Dunworth.

The horse stopped with a sudden jerk. The eyes of Dunworth stood wide and wild in his face, over which fell a sudden mask of anguish and dismay. He sat as if he had been struck stiff by an electric shock.

During the night after he had parted with Ardis, and all through the next day and the next night, Roger had thought and rethought, and had tortured his brain with all manner of things. He was most earnestly in love, and his earnestness had become wild distraction, and his distraction fierce jealousy as he thought of his rival, that

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comparative stranger, spending these three days of excursion with Ardis. It mattered not to him how many others were in the party, or who they were; it maddened him to think of Ardis riding with this man, walking with him, being with him through these three days. It was cruel in her, knowing what she did, to do this thing; to scorn his feelings, and to put this misery on him.

And then there had come a revulsion of feeling. He had been cruel. He should have gone with her. She wanted him to go. She had asked him. His presence would have protected her from the attentions of this man. He had behaved basely in treating her invitation as he had treated it. But back to him came the thought that his feelings had been entirely disregarded. She had gone off with this man, not caring whether or not her going hurt to the death the friend of her youth, her declared lover! And this, too, when there had been an opportunity to give up the expedition; for he had heard of the withdrawal of the Dalrymple family.

On this morning, however, his feelings regarding himself, regarding Ardis, and regarding Surrey, had all united to make it impossible for him to remain any longer at home while these others had gone wandering away together. If she wanted his company at the Ridgeby Caves, he must go; if she did not want him he must go. And he saddled his horse and went.

At the sight of Ardis and Surrey alone together, sitting close to each other under the shade of a tree, she with her face flushed by emotion and holding him by the hand, Roger stopped, and to him the whole world stopped. He did not notice Surrey's pallor, nor his disordered condition. He only knew that it was he, and that Ardis was kneeling close to him with flushed face and holding his hand.

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To a soul so stirred and torn, this blow was too heavy. His head sank upon his breast, and with a groan that was almost like a cry, he whirled his horse around and dashed away.

The delight which had sprung up in Ardis' heart when she first perceived Roger, vanished when she fairly looked upon his face. Instantly she knew all that he thought, and that knowledge driving from her mind everything else, she dropped Surrey's wrist and rose to her feet, her lips parted to speak. But it was too late. All that Roger had seen, all that he had felt had been seen and felt in a moment. The next moment he was gone!

Ardis made some quick steps forward, as pale now as the man who leaned against the tree. She looked down the road, but there was nothing to be seen, although she could still hear the clatter of hoofs upon the stones.

Surrey had seen all, and the corners of his mouth fell grimly. In the hand which had been extended toward Ardis he took his wounded wrist, and pressed upon the vein. Whatever had happened or might happen, it would not do for him to lose any more of his strength.

There was a quick crushing through underbrush and Norma, panting, red-faced, and bearing a pitcher of water, came hurrying up. The little stream in the ravine had been dry and she had pushed through bushes and briers to a spring she knew of. The way by the course she took was difficult, and every hindrance was increased by her nervous fear that the man would swoon or die before she got back.

Ardis had not yet found the heart nor Norma the breath to speak to each other, and the latter was approaching Surrey with the water—although what to do with it she did not know—when voices, clear and loud, were heard; and Purley, followed by Miss Airpenny and Dr. Lester,

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came running from the little house. Not finding any trace of Surrey along the passage they had supposed he had taken, one of the guides, with Prouter and Cruppledean, had gone back along the main route, while Purley and the two others had hurried on toward the entrance to explore some of the chambers they had passed. In one of these they found part of Surrey's coat, his candle trampled to pieces, and blood spots on the floor. By these spots they traced him to the entrance.

The newcomers made rapid and excited inquiries as to what had happened, but Surrey shook his head and declined to talk on the subject until he felt better. When she found he was wounded, Miss Airpenny was instantly down on her knees beside him.

"Doctor," she said, "you must attend to this wound instantly!"

The doctor stepped forward. "I must beg to be excused," he said. "I never practice either medicine or surgery. I will do whatever I can for this gentleman, but I do not attend to wounds."

A sharp inquiry as to why he allowed himself to be called doctor was on Miss Airpenny's lips, but there was no time to waste in remarks of this sort, and she said: "Has anybody a fish-hook about him?"

Dr. Lester felt in his waistcoat pocket. He had all sorts of things about him, and soon produced a small fish-hook. "I have also a bit of adhesive plaster," he said, "and a pair of scissors and a piece of thread."

"Give them to me," said Miss Airpenny. Directing Surrey to take his thumb from his wrist, Miss Airpenny discovered by the flow of blood the exact position of the broken vein, and with the point of the fish-hook she gently drew it out, and while Purley held it she deftly tied it up with a silk thread. Then she released it, closed up the

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wound, and placed several strips of adhesive plaster across it to keep the edges together. After which she made a ligature of a twisted handkerchief which she passed around the arm below the cut and tied loosely. A compress made of a little wad from another handkerchief was placed over the vein, and with a short stick the handkerchief was twisted until the compress was held so firmly on the vein that there was no danger of undue pressure on the silken ligature during the removal of the patient. With the remaining handkerchiefs of the party the stick was secured in position and a sling was made for the arm.

"Now then," said Miss Airpenny, "has anybody any whiskey?"

Purley had some; and when a small dose was administered, Miss Airpenny declared that the man was ready to be moved if there was any way of moving him except on his own legs.

Surrey, who had had a good rest, and who already felt invigorated by the whiskey, said that he could walk to the tavern if he had a little help; and having been raised to his feet, Dr. Lester and Purley, both strong men, took hold of him, one under each arm, and gave him such support that his own legs had a very easy time of it during the slow walk to the tavern. Miss Airpenny walked sometimes before, sometimes behind this group, gratified to see that her patient bore the little journey very well.

During this scene Ardis and Norma had stood together, but apart from the others. In the heart of Ardis there was a dim feeling of thankfulness that Norma had been with her when the people came from the cave, but it was so mixed up with other feelings that she scarcely recognized it.

"You must have been dreadfully frightened," said

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Norma, "for you are almost as pale as Mr. Surrey! I am very sure that if a man is on the point of fainting away or anything like that, I should rather go off and do something than stay with him."

"Do I look pale?" said Ardis. "I have been——"

"Nearly scared out of your wits," said Norma, "for fear the man should expire before your very eyes! I understand that feeling perfectly, and I do not wonder that your nerves gave way. I was dreadfully upset myself, rushing about after water and being afraid something would happen before I could get back! And do you know, Ardis, that just now, when I went to that house to put down the pitcher, I saw a pail of water under a table! If I had seen that——"

"O Norma! Norma!" said Ardis, her words coming from her with an earnestness that astonished her companion, "if you had but seen it! if you had but seen it!"

The other guide, with the two young Englishmen, now came running from the entrance to the caves; and when they had been told that Mr. Surrey had met with an accident and was on his way to the tavern, the five set off down the mountain.

That evening, after supper, Surrey felt strong enough to tell the story of his mishap in the cave, and great consternation was occasioned. Such a thing had never been heard of! That a miscreant who would make such a felonious attack as this should be found in the Ridgeby Caves, or indeed in any part of the surrounding country, was almost incredible! It seemed as if Mr. Surrey must have been attacked by a demon of the earth, for Purley was confident that no human being could get either into or out of the caves without his knowing it. The door of the stairway leading down into the caves was always kept locked.

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When he had opened it that morning the lock was in perfect order, and when the party started on their tour of the caves he had locked it behind them. But if an intruder was in there that person must be in there yet, for the door had been locked that afternoon by the guide who left last.

Purley was much disturbed at this occurrence, not only on Mr. Surrey's account, but on his own; for it would be very detrimental to his business as tavern-keeper and guide if intending visitors to the Ridgeby Caves should have reason to fear that they might be attacked either by men or demons while in the bowels of the earth. He promised that early the next day he would collect a party of armed men and explore every part of the caves, and if any man was concealed there, he would be found.

The conversation during the evening turned entirely upon the assault; but no one was able to offer any reasonable suggestion in regard to it. It might have been that the man intended to rob Mr. Surrey, but was prevented by his vigorous resistance; but as no person likely to make such an attack was known to exist on the surface of the county, no reason could be adduced why he should exist beneath its surface.

It was about nine o'clock when the door of the tavern parlor opened, and a young man, a stranger to all present, entered. He stopped at the door, bowed to the company, and gazed about him. Every one stopped talking and looked at him; and it flashed into the mind of Norma that perhaps this was the miscreant of the caves, who was about to select another victim. But this notion was a very transient one, for it was impossible to look upon this young man as one addicted to violent deeds. He was of medium height, rather slender; he wore a neatly-fitting suit of dark gray; his collar was turned down very low, and a

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black silk handkerchief was knotted in a large bow at his throat. His handsome face showed no sign of beard or moustache. His large eyes moved with an expression of placid inquiry from one person to another, and his long hair was brushed behind his ears.

He stood in a graceful attitude of indecision for some moments, when, suddenly, a gleam came into his eyes and he changed his position to one of successful accomplishment. "Ah!" he said—he was looking at Ardis as he spoke—"I have made no mistake. You must pardon me, Miss Claverden, for intruding upon you and your company, but my excuse shall be quickly forthcoming. My name is Dalrymple, Egbert Dalrymple. When I reached my father's house a day or two ago, I was informed that my family had been invited to join your little excursion to the Ridgeby Caves. Notwithstanding that they had declined, I determined, for my part, that I would not forego the very great pleasure of joining your party; for I had no doubt that I should have been included in the invitation had I been at home!"

"Most certainly, sir," said Ardis, "I am sorry you are too late, for we have returned from the caves. But will you not walk in and take a seat?"

"Thanks," said he. And laying his soft hat upon a table, he gracefully brought forward a chair, and placed it as close to Ardis as the positions of Norma and Dr. Lester would permit.

Miss Airpenney fixed upon the newcomer a steady gaze, and Surrey, who was lying on a sofa in the back part of the room, never took his eyes from him. If any members of the party thought of addressing the newcomer he gave them no opportunity, but went on speaking with an air of kindly graciousness which was intended to put every one at ease.

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"So!" he said, as he seated himself, "I am aware that I am too late, but the pleasure of accompanying you and your party on your return will amply compensate me for the difficulties I have encountered. Difficulties indeed they were! I was obliged to come in a buggy with a negro driver, for I am not acquainted with the roads; and rougher roads I am sure were never known in Christendom. In one place the little river had chosen to flow along the highway, and had left its bed of rounded boulders for the use of passing vehicles. Dreadfully jolting, I assure you, Miss Claverden! And this afternoon as we were going up the steep road a man came galloping down as if all the fiends of earth and air were after him. If it had not been for his horse's eyes—for I am sure he did not use his own—he must have collided with us. Do people hereabouts generally ride in that fashion, Miss Claverden?"

"Not generally," said Ardis. And she fixed her eyes upon the fire on which a colored boy had placed an armful of dried sticks.

The spirit of hospitality now moved Dr. Lester to speak. "Have you had your supper, sir?" he said.

Mr. Dalrymple turned his eyes toward him for a moment. "Not yet, thanks," he said. "But I feel in no present need of refreshment. Later I will speak to the people of the inn."

"If you make it much later," thought Norma, "the kitchen fire will be out and the servants in bed." But she said nothing; and the young man went on with his monologue, describing the further difficulties of the road as if every one present were totally ignorant of them.

This was the young man for whose sake Mrs. Dalrymple had withdrawn from the excursion party, not wishing to expose her only son to the blandishments of that for-

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ward young woman, Miss Ardis Claverden. But the young man, having heard from his father and his sister of the remarkable personal attractions of Miss Claverden, and disapproving entirely of his mother's action, and probably suspecting her reason, he had taken matters into his own hand, and had set off by himself. Had he earlier comprehended the state of affairs he would have reached the caves as soon as the others.

The arrival of this young man was a positive relief to Ardis. She had taken but little part in the general conversation, her mind being so much occupied with what had happened to her that she could not bring her thoughts to bear upon what had happened to Mr. Surrey. With Egbert Dalrymple addressing the company, her abstracted manner was not noticeable, for the attention of every one was given to the newcomer.

A negro boy now came in with a tray on which was some supper for the gentleman who had come late. When the tray was presented to him, Mr. Dalrymple turned sevcrely on the boy.

"Take it away!" he said. "When I need anything I will call for it." And then, as if in apology, he added, looking toward Ardis: "Rural simplicity frequently deserves to be termed clownish stupidity!"

Miss Airpenny had now sat quiet as long as it was possible for her; and, suddenly rising to her feet, she said: "You would better eat your food when you can get it, young man, and if it is the presence of the ladies that hinders you, you needn't stop for that, for we are going to bed."

"So?" cried Mr. Dalrymple, springing to his feet. "The evening has scarce begun."

"It is ended for us," said Miss Airpenny. And Ardis and Norma being very willing to go, the three ladies bade

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the company "Good night;" Miss Airpenny stopping by Surrey's couch to inquire into her patient's condition, and to impress upon him that if his wound needed attention in the night not to hesitate to call upon her.

Mr. Dalrymple stood moodily for a few moments without regarding the other gentlemen who were talking together, and then with an air of brusque indifference ate the supper which had been left on a table. When he had finished he found that the gentlemen had lighted their pipes, and even the recumbent Surrey was puffing a cigarette.

"Will you smoke, sir?" asked Dr. Lester. "I have another pipe."

Egbert Darlymple walked to the end of the mantelpiece, and leaning against it, folded his arms and regarded the speaker. "Smoke!" said he, "what for?"

The idea of any person asking a question like this struck Prouter and Cruppledean as being so ludicrous that they burst out laughing; and even the polite Dr. Lester could not restrain a smile. The countenance of Surrey, however, did not move. He still regarded this young man with severe attention.

With an idea of compassionate scorn Mr. Dalrymple looked at the ceiling; then, his arms still folded and his eyes cast on the floor, he walked with deliberate steps from the room.

Tom Prouter threw himself back in his chair, slapped his knees, and danced his feet. "O the ass! the ass!" he cried, "the head ass of the world!" And he and Cruppledean laughed so much that their pipes went out.

Surrey did not laugh. He had noticed how this remarkably handsome young man had kept his eyes fixed upon Ardis and had addressed no one but her.

Egbert Dalrymple walked out on the little porch of the

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inn and seated himself on the railing, one leg thrown carelessly up before him and his back gracefully inclined against a post. Raising his eyes toward the moon which now had risen high among the floating, white clouds, he soliloquized:

"Enrapturing!" he said in a gentle whisper. "Far more enrapturing than I could have dreamed! What Cecilia told me was not half! Hear me, pretty moon! I give myself to her! As you fill with tender light the downy edges of those white clouds, so shall she illumine my every thought, my every emotion, my every impulse. As the waters follow you, so follow I her. I raise myself up toward her. I reach out to her. What happens I care not. The fair world may be flooded; men may die; women may weep; still reach I up to her. What matters it if I leave bare shores that would have smiled to me; if fame, if fortune, if high aims, are all forgotten, left dry and arid, while I lift myself to her? And if I lift myself in fervid ardor the night will pass, the dawn will come, and she will slowly sink, sink, sink toward ——"

At this moment he heard a little shuffle as of feet beside him, and turning quickly his moon-irradiated face, he saw a small colored boy with sleepy upturned visage.

"Mister," said the boy, "they's all done gone to bed but you, an' he says when you comes in you mus' put out dat ker'sene lamp on de table."

Egbert Dalrymple let himself down on the floor of the porch with a sudden shock. "Damn the kerosene lamp!" he said, as he marched into the house.

Before sunrise the next day Purley, with several armed companions, began the work of thoroughly scouring the caves. It was many hours before they came out, but when he again breathed the outer air Purley had made up his mind. He believed that Mr. Surrey had had a fight

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with a gigantic stalactite; he had run against the thing, and supposed it had struck him, had turned upon it, had dropped his candle, and seizing it with desperate fury had broken it off, and the stone and the man had rolled together on the floor. That Mr. Surrey had described his assailant as cold and slippery was a strong proof in favor of this supposition. And in accounting for the mental condition which would allow a man to fight a stalactite Purley found no difficulty; any person of mature age who would deliberately leave his party in those caves and go wandering about by himself at the risk of dropping down into some bottomless pit, was crack-brained enough to imagine anything! If this affair should come to be generally known Purley determined that his version of the matter should also be known, and he did not doubt that reasonable people would consider his version the true one.

That morning, without waiting for Purley's report, the Bald Hill party returned home. Mr. Surrey felt much stronger, and he and Norma had the carriage all to themselves, Miss Airpenny riding by its side whenever the width of the road allowed. It was not a very jolly party, but there was one happy heart in it. That was the heart of Dr. Lester, for during the whole journey Ardis rode by his side.

Egbert Dalrymple would have kept close to Miss Claverden, had it been possible to do so in a buggy with a negro man driving. As it was, he was obliged to keep in the rear of the little procession—and a good deal in the rear, too, when the road was dusty. But ever he kept his eyes upon that fair one, whom like the tide, he followed. Prouter and Cruppledean had ridden on an hour or two before, the former being anxious to know how his milk route had prospered in his absence. Thus young Dalrymple had been prevented from making an intended proposition to

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one of them to change places with him, so that with a steed beneath him he might ride by the side of Ardis.

Toward noon the party stopped near a spring which ran from the rocks not far from the roadside, and Dr. Lester having dismounted and gone to fill a drinking cup with water, Egbert Dalrymple sprang to the ground and made his way with sprightly step to Ardis.

"Do you not think, Miss Claverden," he said, "that your uncle would be glad to lend me his horse for an hour or two and take my seat in the buggy? I doubt not it would rest him."

"My uncle!" exclaimed Ardis. "Oh, you mean Dr. Lester!" And then, although she was not in a laughing mood, she laughed so heartily that Surrey, with whom Miss Airpenny was talking, looked out of the carriage window. "The doctor is not my uncle," she said, "and I am quite sure he will not care to make the change. He dislikes being driven in a buggy, and never tires in the saddle."

The doctor now came up with the water, and Dalrymple, first casting his eyes up toward the sky and then fixing them on the ground before him, strode with measured pace back to his vehicle.

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CHAPTER XIII.

ON the morning after his return from the Ridgeby Caves, Dr. Lester sat by the bedside of an invalid. He was not there in the capacity of a physician, but as a nurse, a counselor, a companion, a messenger, or in any capacity of general utility.

"I believe you, Bonnet," said the doctor, "in what you say about the value of a wife's hand when employed in rubbing in an embrocation. And does that shoulder feel any better now?"

"Indeed it does," said Bonetti, "and if it didn't I couldn't talk. At first it pained me so that I could scarcely whisper, and that's what I call a pretty bad hurt."

"You are right," said the doctor. "And you seem to have been extensively damaged otherwise."

"I should say so!" replied the other. "Head nearly broken, bruises all over me, and I didn't count the cuts and scratches. How I got myself out of the caves I really can't see!"

"What I cannot see," said the doctor, "is how you got into the caves, or out of them, or why you undertook such a mad piece of business."

"The first part," said Bonetti, a little quiet light of satisfaction coming into his eyes, "was easy enough. There is a way into the Ridgeby Caves that I know, and nobody else does. It takes a pretty spry man to get in or out of it, and if ever I show it to anybody I'll show it to you, Dr. Lester."

"I don't want to see it," said the doctor, earnestly. "I positively decline to know anything about it."

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"All right," said the other. "I went in that way, and I came out that way. I went in because I hoped I'd get a chance to give that man a good thrashing, because he insulted me straight up and down, the worst way; and that's the sort of thing I don't take from any man!"

"But Bonnet," said the doctor, "it is quite plain that you did take the insult, and a good beating besides. But no matter what your reasons were, your conduct is totally inexcusable."

"I don't look on it in that light," said Bonnetti. "I wanted to give him a quick thrash, and I didn't want to injure my reputation either. I have got a wife and daughters, and I owe something to them. People think of me as a peaceable man, and I want 'em to keep on thinkin' so. When I heard he was goin' into the caves I thought that was my chance and I took it. I had matches and candles in my pocket, and I wore a rubber overcoat and boots. I can wait in the dark and the wet as long as any man, and I know the caves as well as Purley does. I didn't do much at follerin' 'em till they were comin' back because it's when people are comin' back that they straggle. I had a notion that man would try to go prowlin' round by himself, but I didn't think he'd give me such a good chance as he did. I couldn't have asked for anything better!"

"Except that the man you attacked should not have been so stout," said the doctor. "It was a low-down trick to do that thing in the dark, Bonnet."

"I don't agree with you, doctor," said Bonetti. "You are always forgettin' my wife and daughters. But he was a tough fellow, most certain, and gave it to me hot and heavy. But I gave him as good as I got and my mind feels easier, though my body don't."

"It has been all wrong, Bonnet, in every possible way," said the doctor. "I won't say any more about jumping

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on a man in the dark, but you have done wrong to me by telling me all this. Here I am to meet a gentleman who has been most mysteriously assaulted; I hear Major Claverden raging about the unparalleled injury done to a man who is a guest beneath his roof; and for days I shall listen to all sorts of plans for discovering and capturing the person who did this deed; and I must hold my tongue or send you to jail, Bonnet."

"I don't see that I've done you any wrong, doctor," said Bonetti. "It just happened that you came, you know. You were passin' by here and you stopped in. You've often done that before, and it's not my fault that you did it now. You heard I was sick in bed and you came up to see me. Was that my fault? And when you got here you asked me what was the matter, and do you suppose I was goin' to tell you a lie? You wouldn't like me to lie to you, would you, doctor?"

"No," replied the other, "I should not like it."

"Well then," said Bonetti, "the whole thing just happened and it's nobody's fault."

The doctor made no reply, but his face showed that he deeply felt the unpleasant position in which he had been placed by his brother philosophizer.

"There is one thing," resumed Bonetti, "which is bad. There's no gettin' around it; it's very bad! I suppose that man would have been goin' away in a day or two, judgin' by the time such people generally stay at gentlemen's houses. But now there's no knowin' when he'll go. Major Claverden won't let him go until he is clean well. And, what's more, he'll not want to be well as long as he has got Miss Ardis to take care of him. And she'll take care of him because she's a woman. I know women. When anybody is sick they haven't got no back bone at all. They just go in and do everything they know how."

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"Well?" said the doctor, now listening with great interest.

"It is all as plain as daylight," said Bonetti. "He'll make the most of his time, and, as like as not he'll get her."

"I don't believe it!" said the doctor warmly.

"Of course," said Bonetti, "if there was any one else around it would be different, but he will have her all to himself. If Roger Dunworth was at home I'd feel easier about it. He wouldn't stand by and let Surrey walk over the course. Dunworth is the man that wants her, and ought to have her. Don't you say so, doctor?"

Dr. Lester pushed back his chair a little and looked out of the window. "Yes," he said.

"But he isn't here," continued Bonetti. "My wife tells me that he passed by here yesterday mornin' in his buggy goin' to town with his yaller boy, Jim. And when Jim came back without him she stopped him, and he told her Mister Roger had gone off on the train, he didn't know where. So you see, doctor, it's a pretty bad case."

"I cannot believe in the danger you speak of," said the doctor, "but I shall be truly sorry if Surrey is obliged to remain at Bald Hill."

"Indeed you will be sorry!" said Bonetti, "and there is only one thing to be done, and that is for you to go in."

"I go in!" exclaimed the doctor. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Bonetti, "for you to pitch right in and cut Surrey out, just as Dunworth would do if he was here. I know it seems a little off-color, but it can't be helped. Any port in a storm. If you would forget all them resolutions of yours and go in strong, it wouldn't do her any hurt and it might drive that man off, or hinder him, any way."

"O Bonnet! Bonnet!" exclaimed Dr. Lester, "what

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are you talking about? It would never do for me to undertake that sort of thing. How could I stop myself if I made a start like that?"

"I don't want you to stop yourself," said Bonetti. "There is a chance that Surrey may get her; and that is all you or I should think of. You may not have to stick it out very long, and when Surrey clears out, if you find you've got in a little too deep, you can clear out too. You might travel for awhile. There's lots of things you might do."

"Bonnet," cried the doctor, rising to his feet, "is your blood as cold and earthy as the drops that turn into stone in Ridgeby Caves? Can you lie there and calmly talk to me about doing a thing like that? The very thought of it is enough to drive a man mad!"

"There's no use in gettin' excited, doctor," said Bonetti. "There's sacrifices to be made in this world, and the best thing we can do is to step out prompt and make 'em."

"Bonnet," said the doctor, taking up his hat and turning toward the door, "never propose such a plan as this to me again!"

"Doctor," said Bonetti, "please wait one moment. Suppose you had a bad pain in your leg from a bruise, and there was a bowl on the table with whiskey and salt in it, and close by it there was a bottle of arnica, if you was goin' to do your own rubbin' which would you choose?"

"Bonnet," said the doctor, a little severely, "you know I never prescribe; you must do your own choosing. Good day."

"Well," said Bonetti to himself as he uneasily turned on his other side, "I am safe with him, for he'll never go back on a friend."

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CHAPTER XIV.

IF Dr. Lester had followed Bonetti's advice he would have greatly gratified Ardis, and she would not have suspected the feelings that lay beneath his attentions. The true character of the doctor's sentiments would never have occurred to Ardis, and she would have been most grateful to this old friend if his presence had in any way acted as a barrier between her and Surrey.

It appeared as if Surrey was likely to remain at Bald Hill for some time, and since he had taken that unfair and unmanly advantage of her kindly solicitude, she had spoken to him only in the most casual way. And she was fully determined that he should have no opportunity to repeat his offence nor even to allude to it.

Norma had declared that it was absolutely necessary for her to return to Heatherley. To remain at Bald Hill with Norma away and Surrey there was not to be thought of, and Ardis decided to go home with her friend.

When this decision was communicated to her father on the evening of the day after the return from the caves, the mind of Major Claverden was troubled. The project did not at all accord with his ideas of hospitality. For the lady of the house to thus absent herself during the visit of an invited guest was an impropriety at any time; and particularly so in the present case. But Ardis was steadfast. It grieved her to run counter to her father's deep-set ideas of courtesy and hospitality; and had Norma or Dr. Lester been there to intervene between her and Mr. Surrey she would have remained at home for the major's

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sake. She would not tell her father what had happened, for she knew it would cause in him a dire conflict between anger and his notions of hospitality toward an injured man. Major Claverden, as was his habit, soon ceased his opposition to his daughter's desire.

"Every attention that your patient needs," she said, "can be given to him better under your direction than under mine, and I think it likely that I shall return very soon."

In saying this Ardis spoke the truth, for she believed that as Surrey must understand why she had gone away he would soon depart. It would not take long for a healthy man, such as he was, to regain his ordinary strength.

There was another motive which prompted Ardis to go away. There was within her a desire, one which she did not acknowledge to herself but which existed in considerable force, to make Roger Dunworth aware that the impression he had received regarding herself and Surrey was an erroneous one. To do this the first step necessary was to separate herself from Surrey.

The next morning at breakfast, when Major Claverden informed his guest that his daughter and Miss Cranton had gone to the home of the latter an hour before, his courteous disposition prompted him to make sundry excuses for this abrupt departure. To these, however, his guest paid little attention. He said nothing except a few words of regret at the absence of the ladies, but he thought a good deal. It was quite plain to him why Ardis had gone away, and his thoughts principally regarded his own action: what ought he to do now?

After breakfast, when he had an hour or two to himself, he gave this subject a great deal of consideration. He decided upon but one thing, and that was to stay at Bald Hill as long as he could. Major Claverden had asserted

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that he would not allow him to leave his house until he had recovered from the effect of his wound. The period of entire recovery could of course be postponed or hastened according to circumstances; and Surrey would wait and see if Fate would yet give him an opportunity to set himself right with Ardis. If he should have this opportunity, he did not at all despair of success. He knew well that he had angered her, but before this he had made his peace with angered women, and he considered himself peculiarly proficient in this sort of pacification. Indeed he believed that he showed to better advantage in the eyes of a woman conciliated than in those of one with whom that process had not been necessary. He had made a mistake with Ardis, but that mistake could easily be explained. When a man's love is so powerful as to run away with him, that fact ought to be used with much effect in an amorous argument.

At all events Surrey was firm in his determination that he would not leave this neighborhood until there was no further hope of an interview with Ardis. It might be that she would be obliged to return in a few days, and if he saw that it was useless to expect her return while he was at Bald Hill, it would be quite within the bounds of politeness for him to ride over to Heatherley and take leave of Ardis and Miss Cranton. Should he do this he doubted not that he would get or make an opportunity to speak with Ardis. He did not flatter himself that his task would be an easy one; he knew it would be hard. He had seen Dunworth sitting stone-like on his horse, and he had looked upon the pale face of Ardis as she had sprung to her feet, and he knew that he had a rival. He also perceived that he was going to have another rival in the person of the young man who had joined them at Purley's tavern. But these facts did not affect his courage or his purpose. He

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was a brave man, and believing himself, in matters of love, as deserving as any other man, had never hesitated, when occasion required, to make strong effort to prove this conviction correct.

Now that his daughter had gone, Major Claverden exerted himself in every way to promote the comfort and pleasure of his guest. Not only had he a deep sympathy for Mr. Surrey's misfortune, but he greatly desired that he should not consider himself deserted or *de trop*. More than this the major really liked Surrey, and was glad to have him for a companion. He did not for a moment look upon him in the light of a suitor for his daughter's hand; and if he had so looked he would not have considered him as one she would allow to urge his suit. Surrey was a congenial companion at table, a good story-teller, well informed on many points, and, above all, he was one of the very few persons who took an intelligent interest in the wine of Bald Hill. Surrey devoted himself earnestly to a study of the culture of the vine and the properties of the grape, and particularly to those especial vines and grapes on which Major Claverden founded his hopes. Sometimes he could not help laughing a little to himself that he should be engaged in researches so utterly foreign to the ordinary occupations of his mind; but when he had an object before him he was accustomed to work with energy to accomplish it. He knew it would be greatly to his advantage to win the favor of the major, but, more than this, he had a genuine desire to become proficient in pursuits which, if the matrimonial project succeeded, might become his own. He believed it would suit him very well to become a country gentleman, at least for a part of the year, and if the estate of Bald Hill should ever come under his management he wished to know how to manage it to advantage. That his chances of succeed-

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ing to such management appeared to him slighter than they had a few days before had no effect upon his purpose. If he had any chance whatever of success, he would do what he could to prepare himself to take full advantage of that success—should it come.

Surrey had given much consideration to the major's experiments, and considering the experience of the experimenter, the favorable conditions and the good progress that had apparently been made, he could see no good reason why the wine of Bald Hill should not become the Johannisberger of America, and yield a fortune to the men who controlled the vineyards. So, at all hours Jack Surrey talked "grape" with his host, making suggestions which were not without value, and listening attentively to theories and details of practice, thus making himself such an agreeable companion to Major Claverden, that the latter frequently declared that it was eminently proper that he should remain at Bald Hill and write the article for which the notes and sketches had there been made.

On the day of her arrival at Heatherley, Ardis wrote a note to Roger Dunworth. She greatly disliked to do this, but anything was better than to allow him to remain under the mistaken impression which she knew had been made upon him. After what she had said to him concerning her intentions to allow no man to make love to her, she could not endure the thought that he should have cause to believe that she was not only permitting attentions from Mr. Surrey, but reciprocating them. Her regard for her own integrity, and her desire for its full recognition, would not allow her to rest until she had written to Dunworth to ask him to come to see her at Heatherley on a subject of importance. When he came she would quickly make him understand the true state of the case; and then all she had previously said to him would have the same force and purport that it had had when she had said it.

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But her messenger returned with the news that Mr. Dunworth had left his house two days before, and that his destination was not known. It was supposed, however, that he would soon return. With much disappointment, therefore, Ardis put her note in her portfolio to be sent again as soon as she should hear that Mr. Dunworth had come back.

But a week passed and he did not come back; and great was the talk of the neighborhood concerning this fact. He had made known his intentions to no one; he had left no directions behind him; he had not written; and the boy who had driven him to Bolton did not know whether he had taken a Northern bound train or one going South. The ticket agent at the station recollected having sold him a ticket, but there was a train up and one down at nearly the same hour, and he could not remember for which one Mr. Dunworth had taken his ticket.

Messrs. Parchester, Skitt, and Cruppledean were now left in charge of affairs at the Dunworth farm, and they managed them to the best of their ability, but there were things that they did not understand, and in cases of doubt or ignorance they naturally consulted with their compatriots, the Quantrills. Miss Airpenny, who seemed to have given up all thoughts of present travel, was much concerned at the condition of the Dunworth household. She had bought her riding horse of Roger Dunworth, and, strange to say, this transaction had caused her to like him. She listened with much attention to what the three agricultural pupils had to say, and then she spoke:

"What that place wants," she said, "is a head; and as I have one which is out of employment at present, I shall take it there. Whether the man comes back to-morrow, or stays away a fortnight longer, it is a Christian duty to see that he does not suffer for it. That he should go

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away when he feels like it and stay away as long as he chooses shows that some of the English blood of his ancestors is left in him, and I shall stand by English blood wherever I find it!"

"What are you going to do?" asked Mr. Quantrill. "Are you going to teach those boys American farming?"

"I don't propose to teach them anything," said Miss Airpenny, "but I shall see to it that they shall do what they have been taught. And I shall teach somebody—I don't know who yet—how to keep a house in order so that it shall be fit for the master to come back to, or be brought back to, if so be it that is the case. Now will you be good enough to have my horse saddled?"

Parchester, Skitt, and Cruppledean were not entirely pleased with Miss Airpenny's assumption of the vacant throne, but they knew that when she had made up her mind to do what she deemed a good action, and which at the same time accorded with her inclinations, it would be a waste of energy to endeavor to oppose her. And, therefore, the four rode back together to the Dunworth farm.

Roger Dunworth had a widowed sister who lived in Kentucky, and as it was known that he frequently assisted her in the management of her affairs, it was supposed by many persons that he had suddenly been called away on her account. But as is usual in such cases, most people talked and surmised while one person acted. That person was Miss Airpenny.

"If I understood housekeeping in the American fashion," she said to the Dunworth house servants, "I should have you do your work in that way, and should see that you did it properly. But I don't understand it, and therefore shall do my housekeeping in the way I do understand. I want you to know that we must now have tea and but-

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tered toast for breakfast, and no kind of hot bread nor coffee. And you are not all to go to bed at nine o'clock, for about that time we shall have supper."

Aunt Lucy in the kitchen lifted up her hands and eyes in solemn sadness when Miss Airpenny had gone from her. "I's allus prayed to live long," she said, "an', so far, my pra'rs has been answered. But I never reckined to live long 'nuf to git breakfus' without hot bread. If Mr. Roger don' come back soon I reckin it's about time to stop de pra'rs an' git ready fer de udder shohr."

But as Mr. Roger might come home any day the prayers were not stopped, and the new kind of breakfast was prepared every morning and enjoyed.

Major Claverden thought a great deal and talked a great deal about Dunworth's absence. He talked at home, and he rode over to the Dunworth place and talked to Miss Airpenny.

"There is every reason to suppose," said he to the latter, "that my young friend is with his sister. But why he does not write I cannot imagine!"

"Now really, sir," exclaimed Miss Airpenny, "don't you think that this business of trying to imagine why people don't do this thing or that is very tiresome? It is not only that, but it is dangerous. It is like twirling one's self about with a gun in one's hand and firing at random, hoping to hit a bird. There is about a chance in a million that one may hit a bird, but one is much more likely to kill a neighbor's child."

The major smiled. "I have no desire, madam, to commit murder with my suppositions."

"Of course not," said Miss Airpenny, "but wild imaginings may do almost as much harm as wild shots."

"Your sentiments are highly commendable, madam," said the major, "and I will restrict my suppositions to

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what you may consider a blank cartridge. I will take it for granted that, intending every day to return, Mr. Dunworth does not think it worth while to write."

Miss Airpenny agreed that this sort of shot would not hurt anybody. And after making a hearty offer of his services, or his advice, should either be needed, Major Claverden took his leave.

Jack Surrey did not believe that Dunworth had been called from home by family affairs. The man on the horse who had dashed away from Ridgeby Caves was not absent because he wanted to see his sister. "What I must do," thought Surrey, "is to have my say with Ardis Claverden before that fellow comes back!"

There were not many visitors now at Bald Hill, but Egbert Dalrymple, very correctly attired in riding costume, ambled up to the door on the afternoon of the day on which Ardis had departed; but on being informed that the young lady had gone away on a visit to Heatherley, he slightly frowned, cast his eyes upon the ground, and rode away.

Jack Surrey looked after him. "There is no danger in that fellow," he said. "There is not enough of the staying quality in him. But if I really thought that such an ass had any chance of first reaching the winning-post, I should be ashamed to be in the race!"

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CHAPTER XV.

LIKE Mr. Surrey, Ardis knew very well that Roger Dunworth had not gone to see his sister. That he had gone at all troubled her much. And yet she did not blame herself for anything she had said or done. Under similar circumstances she would again say to him the same things. That which grieved and troubled her had been an accident, and a most unfortunate one. Had not Mr. Dunworth appeared at the only time when he could have received that false and shocking impression, there would have been nothing to regret, except, indeed, Mr. Surrey's impropriety.

She now believed that he had come to the Ridgeby Caves because he was in a better state of mind than when she had last seen him, and had determined to put himself on his old footing, and to be the good friend and companion of former days. That this purpose had been thwarted in the most unfortunate way agitated the soul of Ardis as it never had been agitated before. She now desired nothing so much as the opportunity of explaining everything to Roger Dunworth.

There was a certain sensation heretofore very unusual with Ardis, which at this time frequently possessed her; and this was the sensation of fear. It was a nervous dread that Roger Dunworth would again make his appearance when she and Surrey were together. She was very sure that the latter would not omit the courteous performance of coming to Heatherley to take leave of her, when about to end his visit to Bald Hill. This event might

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take place at any time, and under its cover she knew that he would have something to say. She also would have something to say which should be very brief and decisive. But the presentiment never left her that at the moment of this conference, short as it might be, there would appear before her the pained and pallid face of Roger. This feeling was so strong that she sometimes found herself looking out of an upper window, this way and that, to see if some one were coming. Should the some one be Roger Dunworth, she would hasten to meet him; and, after that, the sooner Surrey came the better, in order that he might know what she had to tell him and depart.

But her agitation and her nervous fear were known only to herself. She would not have it supposed that she had anything to do with the absence of Roger Dunworth; or that it occasioned in her anything more than the natural anxiety which it gave to all his friends and neighbors. The Cranton family found her a most lively and agreeable visitor.

But it was not only the Heatherley people who found her agreeable. On the third day after her arrival there Mr. Egbert Dalrymple appeared; this time alone in a buggy, and in an attire suited to the season of early autumn. The brownish-green hue of his harmonious garments was relieved by a single touch of color.

Ardis was glad to see him. It is true she knew him but slightly, and when they had talked of him she and Norma had laughed at him; but she was very well satisfied that he should come at this time. The Cranton family was a busy one, and unless she followed its members about, a proceeding not always desirable to them or to herself, she was frequently left alone. It was at these periods she most feared the arrival of Surrey, and that

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in one of them Mr. Dalrymple should come instead was a relief. Therefore it was that she held out her hand with a bright smile to Mr. Dalrymple.

This young man was not given to concealing his sentiments. Whatever his mood he made it apparent; and if it suited him to put his thoughts into words, it mattered little to him whether or not other people cared to hear those words. He soon made it plain to Ardis that he had come there expressly to see her; that it gave him great pleasure to see her; and that he did not want to see anybody else. These sentiments, enunciated with a tasteful force peculiar to Mr. Dalrymple, amused her and did not displease her.

When he had been with her from five to seven minutes, Mr. Dalrymple, still seated, threw himself into an attitude of respectful importunity.

"Miss Claverden," said he, "will you not drive with me? I came in a buggy for this. The day is all that could be desired." And he rose to his feet as if the matter were settled.

His assured manner made Ardis laugh. "If you had brought a larger vehicle," she said, "so that Miss Cranton, who is my friend and hostess, could go with us, your invitation might have been considered."

Mr. Dalrymple folded his arms and gazed over them to the floor. "Miss Cranton?" he said. "So!" Then suddenly turning toward Ardis, "I cannot comprehend," he said, "this craving for other people. I abhor other people! They are always in the way! One cannot establish a harmony if other people are tolerated. Do you follow me, Miss Claverden?"

"Oh, yes," replied Ardis. "And may I ask, Mr. Dalrymple, if you are a proficient in the art of establishing harmonies?"

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"Proficient!" exclaimed the young gentlemen, "I would I were!" And his face grew sombre. Then suddenly his expression changed to one of thoughtful determination, lightened by a touch of hopeful belief. He placed a chair in front of Ardis and sat down, one foot advanced, the other drawn well back, his body slightly inclined forward, and his right hand in the breast of his partly buttoned coat. "Miss Claverden," he said, "harmonies depend upon sympathies. And perfect sympathies—how rare! There are millions of stars in the sky at night, but have you ever tried to find two which are verily alike? There are such. We know it. But the task of discovering them is arduous indeed!"

"I never thought of that," said Ardis, "but when I was a little girl I used to try to find two sassafras leaves that were alike. You can't imagine, Mr. Dalrymple, how almost impossible it is to establish a harmony in a sassafras tree."

Mr. Dalrymple made no answer to this remark, and his face indicated the presence of a gentle pain, quickly followed by a generous resignation. He let his eyes move around the room; they fell upon the piano. He arose, approached it, and picked up a piece of music. Then he dropped casually upon the stool, and strummed a few notes. After a little he turned himself about, and, still seated on the stool, began to talk of Mendelssohn and Strauss. The conversation on musical subjects continued until Norma came in, and, very shortly after this, the visitor departed.

The next day Mr. Egbert Dalrymple came again; this time bringing Ardis a bouquet composed of a few long-stemmed flowers harmoniously arranged. As he entered the parlor he noticed that Ardis was dressed in blue, and, therefore, drawing from his bouquet a spray of purple

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blossoms, the most beautiful of all, he threw it out of the window. Then, with a bow, he begged Miss Claverden to be seated and laid his offering in her lap.

Every morning this young gentleman came to Heatherley, and his coming created a great deal of amusement in the Cranton household. Ardis laughed as much as any of them—no one would have connected nervous agitation or mental dread with her demeanor—but she did not discourage the visits of the young man.

It was in the mornings that she was most alone; it was in the mornings that he came; and it was in the mornings that she looked out for the approach of Dunworth, or of Surrey. If the first had come, how quickly would Egbert Dalrymple have been shaken off! If the latter, how closely would he have been detained!

It is true that Ardis frequently felt herself bored by the effort to establish harmonies, whether between flowers or stars, or human souls; but anything of this sort was better than the terrible discordance for which she was continually looking out. In the matter of conversational intercourse she would have preferred visits from Dr. Lester, but she feared Dr. Lester was a man who would courteously retire before a Surrey. Egbert Dalrymple she knew would retire before no man so long as she allowed him to stay. And then again Dr. Lester did not come to Heatherley during Ardis's stay. There was something strange in this, and it was talked about by the Crantons. Ardis was sorry that her old friend stayed away; knowing his helpful disposition and his devotion to his friends, she conjectured that he did not accept the general interpretation of Roger Dunworth's absence, and that he was looking deeper into the matter than any one else had done. Therefore she wished to see him, hoping that she might learn what he had learned.

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But instead of Roger Dunworth, or Mr. Surrey, or Dr. Lester, every day came Egbert Dalrymple; and no bolder, franker, and more truly uncloaked suitor ever entered lists to fight for lady's hand. Other men might adore in secret, plan and contrive, rack themselves with jealousy, or sadly assign themselves to their fate. His business in life was to establish a harmony with Ardis Claverden, and to that he devoted himself.

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CHAPTER XVI.

ARDIS had now been ten days at Heatherley, and her mind began to be disturbed to such a degree that it was difficult to conceal the disturbance under her ordinary demeanor. Nothing had been heard from Roger Dunworth, and, so far as she knew, Mr. Surrey intended to spend the autumn at Bald Hill. She had received a note from her father in which he said he thought her visit to the Crantons had continued quite long enough, but he made no reference to the departure of his guest. What she ought to do Ardis knew not. To stay away from home any longer would make the reason plain to everybody and that very unpleasantly. To acquaint her father with the real reason of her absence would make it necessary for him to inflict a wound upon his own hospitable heart; and to go to Bald Hill while Surrey was there was impossible.

Ardis knew that Norma understood why she stayed away from her home, but the Cranton family must soon begin to wonder at this protracted visit; perhaps the neighbors were already talking about it, and even her father would begin to suspect that there must be an unusual reason for her desertion of his house for that of a friend, so easy to visit at any time.

The feeling that something ought to be said or done weighed heavily upon Ardis, but what to say or do she could not decide. Mr. Dalrymple, too, was beginning to weigh upon her; his eccentricities had ceased to interest her and one morning, before it was time to expect him,

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she set out for a gallop over the fields on her mare, Janet, which she had had brought over from Bald Hill.

She rode through the apple orchard to the great farmyard, crossed this, and at the other side ascended the sloping road which ran along the side of the uplands which formed the principal part of the Heatherley estate. Out upon the open fields, with a beautiful country stretching far around her, she touched her mare with the whip, and away they went. Reaching the top of a gentle eminence, which was the highest point in the field, Ardis reined up and turned about to survey the scene. It was an interesting country over which she gazed and it was her own country. Every spot she saw she knew.

Far away stretched the blue line of the mountains; forest and field gave various shades of green and brown and red to the undulating landscape; the little river Tardiana wound through the scene showing itself here and there. And in plain view, along the road which ran by Heatherley, appeared a horseman.

Ardis smiled. "It is poor Mr. Dalrymple," she said to herself. But instantly she changed her mind. The horseman was too far away for her to recognize him, but he was not coming from the direction of the Dalrymple place. The mare was anxious to go on, but Ardis restrained her. She would wait and see whether or not the man turned into the gateway.

He turned into the gateway and as he did so Ardis recognized her father's sorrel riding horse, and, soon after, she knew the rider to be Mr. Surrey.

"Oho!" she said to herself. "He is coming to make a morning call at Heatherley!" A slight expression of scorn came upon the face of Ardis. "The farther away the better," she said. And turning Janet's head she rode down the other side of the slope.

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Ardis and the mare had a good hour of it, galloping over level pastures, fording little streams, leaping a rail fence now and then, but always keeping their heads turned away from Heatherley. At length they came into a field by which ran a public road, and on this road Ardis saw a woman jogging slowly on a stout brown horse. This rider, in an odd-looking green riding-habit, could have been recognized at any distance as Miss Airpenny.

Ardis rode rapidly down to the fence and put her mare straight at it. It was rather a high fence, but neither Janet nor her rider thought for a moment of shirking the leap. The animal gathered herself up, made a beautiful spring, and went over without touching.

"Now, really!" exclaimed Miss Airpenny, not a hundred feet away. "Is that the way you ride, and all alone too? Don't you fancy that something might happen to you, and nobody by?"

Ardis laughed. "You nearly always ride alone, Miss Airpenny," she said, "and yet I don't believe you ever think of anything happening to you."

"I don't clear fences," said Miss Airpenny. "But something has happened to me. And a very pleasant thing it is, too! I have met a woman. You don't know how I have been longing for the sight of another gown besides my own."

Both riders had now stopped their horses.

"Don't you find your present matronly position a congenial one?" asked Ardis.

"Not a bit of it!" said the other. "If I did not consider it my duty to stay and take care of things I would leave the house this day. You can't fancy what it is to live with three regular cubs, and an irregular cub in the shape of Tom Prouter dropping in at any moment! Now do you want to do a charitable deed? Come and take

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dinner with me. The cubs and I dine early, you know. Take pity on me, and come."

Ardis hesitated. She liked Miss Airpenny and would be glad to visit her. There was no reason why she should not go to the Dunworth place since Roger was not there and Miss Airpenny was the hostess; and, as there was every reason to suppose that Mr. Surrey would protract his call as long as possible in order to see her, she did not wish to return to Heatherley at present. After a few moments' reflection she accepted Miss Airpenny's invitation and the two rode on together.

"Have you heard anything from Mr. Dunworth?" asked Ardis.

"Not a word," said Miss Airpenny. "And you are the third person who has asked after him to-day. I am sure it is greatly to Mr. Dunworth's credit that his neighbors take such an interest in him."

A half-hour's ride brought the ladies to the house, and Parchester, Skitt, and Cruppledean were not displeased when they learned who was to dine with them and went upstairs to put on their best coats; while Tom Prouter, who had been there all the morning, was positively delighted, and thanked the happy star which had led him to come and make his inquiries about Dunworth on this particular day. It was a lively dinner table, for Miss Airpenny who had been tired of talking to nobody but men now broke into cheerful chat, and Ardis was careful to allow no change to appear in her ordinary sprightly demeanor. The three pupils listened earnestly and laughed a good deal, but Prouter took his full share in the conversation. The remarks in reference to Miss Claverden and himself, which Cruppledean had once made to him, had ceased to depress him. His boyish face glowed with unreasoning hopefulness.

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After dinner the sky began to darken and it was plain that a storm was coming, and when Ardis spoke of hastening back to Heatherley before the rain, Miss Airpenny took a look at the clouds and would not let her go. Fearing that Norma might be troubled at her absence, Ardis wrote a note to her, explaining the situation, and sent it to Heatherley by a negro boy who thought much more of an actual quarter-dollar than a possible drenching. In an hour the boy returned, having got his drenching in spite of the wild galloping of his mule, and brought an answer from Norma. It ran thus:

"I am glad you are away, because Mr. Surrey is here. He came to bid you good-by—he says both of us, but I don't believe it. He said he would wait until you returned, and he is waiting now. Can't you stay with Miss Airpenny until I send you word that he has gone away? I told him you were visiting Miss Airpenny and I am sure that he thinks she is at the Quantrills', and if he chooses to ride over there it is his own business."

In consequence of this note; of the fact that the storm had developed into a steady rain; and of Miss Airpenny's most pressing invitation, Ardis determined to spend the night where she was. Never was necessary farm work hurried through so rapidly as on that afternoon. When Miss Airpenny came into the parlor an hour before sunset, and saw the three farm pupils sitting there in their best clothes, she was surprised.

"Have you seen that the milking has been done, and that the cattle and horses have been properly attended to?" she asked.

"All is arranged," said Parchester, with much complacency; and he with Skitt and Cruppledean continued to sit and bask in the presence of Miss Claverden, while Tom Prouter talked with her. Mr. Prouter had no more

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idea of going home that night to attend to his own business than he had of going to the house of some distant stranger to attend to his business, and after supper he gave some interesting details in regard to his milk route.

"The day before yesterday," said he, "I made up my mind that the milk business is a tiresome bore, and that I would give it up. And when I came over here to-day I hoped I would find Dunworth had come back, so that I could try to get him to buy the milk route with all the plant."

"I expected that," said Miss Airpenny, "but you have given up very soon. I thought you would hold out till the middle of October. They have frost here by that time, you know, and I expected that to nip you and your projects."

"Frost!" exclaimed Mr. Prouter, "I care no more for frost than for sunshine! But I'll tell you what did nip me. For a week or more I've been driving one of the wagons and serving the milk, for since I have given up going round the country for no particular purpose I'm bound to be busy at something, you know. I found serving milk rather jolly too, because I had never done it before and it was altogether a new kind of fun. But the day before yesterday a big, fat, dirty black woman with an old pitcher in one hand and six coppers in the other came out to me, and when I poured out a quart of milk for her she said: 'Mister, I reckon you feeds your cows on lemon skins, 'cause the milk gits sour almost as soon as you's done gone.' 'Now, look here, Aunt Polly, or whatever your name is,' said I, 'I don't believe you ever wash that pitcher. You go and tell your mistress that she can't expect to have sweet milk if it's put in a pitcher with old milk sticking to the sides a week at a time.' 'Mistress!' said she, 'I ain't got no mistress.' 'Who's this milk for?'

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said I. 'It's fer me,' said she, 'me an' the chillun.' 'Do you mean to say,' said I, 'that for a week past I have been bringing milk to you?' 'Yas, you has,' said she, 'an' ain't I paid you?' Now, when the idea came to me that I, a gentleman, you know, was making my living by fetching milk to dirty black niggers it made my blood boil! If there had been a mistress behind her I wouldn't have minded, but to be milkman to that African slattern was too much! I slung the pennies she had paid me on the sidewalk, and jerking the pitcher from her hand I dashed it into the middle of the street, breaking it into bits, and splashing the side of a carriage with milk-mud, which I fancy had never happened to it before. I tossed the woman half a dollar with which to buy a clean pitcher, and then I set off at a gallop and ran over two ducks for which I had to pay a nigger shoemaker seventy-five cents, though I'm sure he sent them to market afterward. And as to the rest of my customers, I forgot all about them, and there was a row the next day. Now, you know that sort of thing don't pay, to say nothing of a man's family feelings. Really, wasn't that reason enough for me to say that I would wash my hands of that milk?"

There was a laugh and a general assent that his reason was sufficient.

"Because you know," said Ardis, "as you are bound to give up the business any way, you might as well give it up for that reason as for any other."

This remark plunged Prouter into sudden thought. Did not Miss Claverden believe in his determination to be a man among men? Instantly there was a change in his ideas.

"But I am not going to give it up!" he cried. "Day before yesterday was one thing, and to-day is quite another. I may not drive the wagons any more, but I do

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not intend to be idle. I may as well stick to it. I dare say there's a dirty nigger with an unwashed pitcher in every profession, and I'll take mine just as other people have to take theirs. Now, that's the way to look at it, isn't it, Miss Claverden?"

"That is a way to look at it," said Ardis.

"But you surely think that a man ought not to sit idle when everybody else is working?"

"I certainly think so," was the answer.

"Good!" exclaimed Prouter, clapping his hands on his knees.

"Do you mean," asked Skitt, when the ladies had retired for the night, "that you are going to keep up that beastly milk business?"

"I mean," said Prouter, standing up very straight, with a lighted match in one hand and a pipe in the other, "that living in a land where man proves his worth by honest endeavor I intend to do that same thing myself."

Parchester, Skitt, and Cruppledean laughed unrestrainedly. "You didn't think of all that before you saw Miss Claverden to-day, did you?" asked the latter.

"No, sir, I did not," answered Prouter, with flashing eyes, "but I think of it now!" And he lighted his pipe just before the flame of the match reached his fingers.

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CHAPTER XVII.

THE Dunworth house, although but two stories high, was a long one and covered a good deal of ground; and on the first floor, at the extreme end of the building, were two guest chambers, opening into each other, one of which Miss Airpenny had appropriated to herself, and to the other she conducted Ardis. Farther back than these rooms, on the other side of a hall, stood the large room of the master of the house.

"Look in here," said Miss Airpenny, as with a lamp in her hand she approached the open door of this room. "I keep everything ready for him whenever he chooses to come back. Tom Prouter wanted to sleep in here because he said the room was a comfortable one, and might as well be used. But I wouldn't listen to it. When a man has true English blood in his veins, as Mr. Dunworth has, and goes away when he feels like it, it is no more than due to him that he shall find everything ready for him when he feels like coming back. I had a brother who started off one morning to buy a horse, but instead of that he went to Canada and staid four years and made a lot of money, and when he came back he threw his hat on the table and his top-coat over the back of his chair, just as if what he had done had been a matter of course. That's the way they all do it, and they can't see why people should be surprised. True English blood will tell!"

Ardis looked into the room with a peculiar interest. The books, the large table littered with paper bags of seed and this, that, and the other thing which Roger had temporarily

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laid there; the arm-chair pushed obliquely back from the table; the long overcoat and hat hanging against the wall; the narrow bed in a far corner; everything in the room impressed Ardis with the personality of its owner. She had never seen this room before, but in it she could see so much that represented Roger Dunworth that the man himself seemed to be near her.

"Do you know," said Miss Airpenny, "that somehow, when I look into this room I can't help fancying it belonged to somebody dead and gone? But I give such thoughts short shrift, I tell you. I'd as lief be a French woman as to think like that!"

When Ardis had gone to bed she did not feel at all like sleeping. The oddness of her situation kept her mind very active. When she was a little girl and Roger Dunworth's parents were alive, she had visited this house, but she had seen only a few of the rooms and did not remember them very well. It was strange to be here now, and as the guest of Miss Airpenny! It seemed to Ardis that Roger's room had done more to impress him upon her mind than all her previous intercourse with him. This may have been so, or it may have been that the sight of the room, with all its suggestions of personality, had fixed and set impressions which had before been but partially developed. With her eyes shut or open he was before her, and he stood in the position which he had chosen to take, and not in the one in which she had wished him to stand. She went to sleep thinking of him, and thinking of him in the light of a lover.

Ardis did not sleep well. Even after she had dropped into a doze she was aroused by the young men going upstairs. Pupils of husbandry with a guest in their midst are apt to be noisy, and although these young fellows had no idea that they disturbed the ladies sleeping at the other

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end of the house, the slamming of the front door and their heavy boots upon the stairs aroused Ardis, and she could hear Miss Airpenny in the next room turn over and grumble. Even after the young men had gone up-stairs they could occasionally be heard, and after Ardis had supposed she had been asleep for hours she was half-awakened by the sound of footsteps and of closing doors.

In the morning she arose early, before Miss Airpenny, and went out upon the piazza. The air was fresh and cool with white clouds hurrying across the blue sky. Voices could be heard in the distant farm-yard, but she saw no one, until a boy, whom she recognized as the little fellow who, mounted on a much-too-spirited horse, had once been sent after a runaway steer, came over the lawn toward the house, his boots shining from contact with the wet grass.

"Do you know where Mr. Parchester is, ma'am?" asked the boy.

"No," said Ardis. "Have you looked for him at the barn?"

"He's not there," said the boy. "I reckon he's not up yet. Will you please give him this note, ma'am, when he comes down?" And going up the piazza steps the boy handed Ardis a folded slip of paper. "Mr. Dunworth told me just to give it to him, and there wouldn't be no answer," said the boy, as he went down the steps.

"Who told you?" exclaimed Ardis, advancing suddenly to the edge of the piazza.

The boy stopped. "Mr. Dunworth, ma'am," he said. "He give it to me early this mornin'; it wasn't real daylight yet. I was goin' out to look at my traps an' nobody else was up. He give me that note to give to Mr. Parchester just before he went away."

Under ordinary circumstances Ardis would have told

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the boy that he should not set traps at this time of the year, but now she thought of no such trifle. Her eyes were wide open, her lips were slightly parted, her whole soul was intent upon the answer to the questions which she rapidly put to the boy. "When did he come? Where did he go?"

"I don't know when he came, ma'am; reckon it must 'a' been in the middle of the night. I asked 'em down at the barn, but nobody seen him but me. I reckon he come on Dr. Lester's yellow horse, for that's left in the stable, but he went away on his own horse—that big bay, ma'am, that you once rode."

"And he didn't say where he was going?" asked Ardis.

"Not to me, ma'am," said the boy. "All he said to me was to give that note to Mr. Parchester." And then, having told all that he knew, the boy went away.

Ardis stood motionless with the folded paper in her hand, and her eyes fixed upon the distant landscape, but seeing nothing. Roger Dunworth had been here! He had been here, and she had been in his house! It had been he whom she had heard in the night walking about and shutting doors. And she in his house! Now she remembered something. There were two entrance ways to this old mansion, both opening on the long front piazza; the smaller and narrower hallway lay between the guest chambers and Roger Dunworth's room. By this smaller door Ardis and Miss Airpenny had gone to their rooms the evening before, and Ardis remembered that Miss Airpenny had locked it behind them. Ardis had found this door open this morning, but had thought nothing of the circumstance. But now she felt sure that Roger Dunworth had gone out of that door. He had come in some other way; he had been in his room, hours perhaps; and he had gone out of that door in the early, early

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morning, leaving it open. He had passed by the very door of her room! And he had gone! And where?

Ardis stood still, thinking vehemently. He had seen no one; he could have had no idea she was there. Had he known she was there, would he have staid? Had she known he was there, she would have called to him; she would have dressed herself and gone out to him; she would have told him what a dreadful and wrong impression he had received the day he came to the Ridgeby Caves; and then, had he chosen, he might have gone. But he would have known.

But here was this note. This might tell something. Where was Mr. Parchester? She stepped quickly to the large front door, but it was locked. Then she went back to the other door and entered the house. She walked along the passage, but saw no one. The door of Roger Dunworth's room was open wide, and as she passed it she could not help looking in. It was just as she had seen it the evening before. But no! The heavy overcoat and hat that had hung against the wall were gone. Her quick eye noticed this, and the sight of the empty peg struck her like a missile. If he had intended soon to return, Roger would not have taken that great, heavy overcoat. She turned quickly and went away, and as she walked toward the open door she heard footsteps upon the piazza. She ran out, and there she saw Mr. Parchester, always the earliest riser of the pupils, who had just come out of the large front door. She hurried toward him.

"Mr. Parchester," she said, "here is a note for you from Mr. Dunworth. It was handed to me by a boy. Will you please read it quickly, and tell me where he is?"

Mr. Parchester was surprised at the pale face and earnest manner of Miss Claverden, and he was somewhat confused because he had on his rough and soiled farm clothes,

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not expecting to meet the young lady so early in the morning. But he was not in the least perturbed by receiving a note from Mr. Dunworth, and he immediately opened and read it. "There is not much in it," he said, "and he does not give his address." And he handed the note to Ardis. She read it eagerly. It ran thus:

"Mr. Parchester:—I do not know when I shall be back. I leave the direction of the farm to you. Do not attempt anything new. You know the fields which are for wheat this season. Have it put in as it was last year. Get everything ready for winter.

"Yours truly, R. D."

There was a strange appearance in Ardis' eyes as she looked up from this note to Mr. Parchester's face. "It seems," she said, and the words did not appear to come easily, "as if Mr. Dunworth intended to stay away for a long time."

Mr. Parchester looked steadily at the beautiful eyes which were fixed upon him. He imagined that tears were trying to get into them. "It does look that way," he said, thinking but little of his instructor's intended absence and very much of the eyes.

Generally Ardis had good control over herself; but very early in the morning, when one had not slept well, strong emotion is apt to get the advantage of ordinary control. The tears did come into her eyes. She saw that her companion was looking at her with great interest, and she saw, too, that he knew what it was in which she took so great an interest.

Her present state of mind was novel to her. It annoyed her, but she could not help it. She knew it meant a great deal, but she did not now endeavor to define to

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herself what it meant. She looked at Mr. Parchester; she knew that by the emotion she had shown, she had taken this man, almost a stranger, into her confidence.

Ardis was quick to act. She held out her hand to him. Mr. Parchester's hand was very large, the palm red and rough, and the back of it hairy and covered with freckles, and in it he took the soft white hand of Ardis, and held it for a moment.

"Mr. Parchester," said she, "you will not speak of this, will you?" She did not say what it was of which she would not have him speak, but he knew, and promised never to speak of it. And he never did.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

THE intelligence of the night visit of Roger Dunworth to his home caused much commotion in the household, and was the subject of anxious conversation at the breakfast-table. Miss Airpenny was forced to admit that the restlessness of true English blood was not sufficient to account for this form of absentation. There must be at the bottom of it something she could not understand.

"I dare say it's money," said Tom Prouter. "When a man goes off this way it's as like as not there's money trouble at the bottom of it. There was a gentleman in Fligwich—where my family live, Miss Claverden—who went off in very much this way and staid a fortnight; but he came back all right, an uncle having died in the mean time."

"But that sort of thing can't be depended on to happen," said Miss Airpenny.

"Now then," said Mr. Parchester, speaking up in a bold manner very unusual with him, "that's all stuff about money troubles. I know that last year was a very prosperous one with Mr. Dunworth, and there is no reason to suppose that he has not all the money he wants. He has gone away to attend to his own business in his own way, and when he has attended to it he will come back; and that's all there is about it!" As he finished speaking he could not help glancing at Ardis, and the look of gratitude which he received sent the blood into his face, which, however, was not noticed on account of his general redness.

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"I have no doubt you are right," said Ardis, "and I am sure that Mr. Dunworth would not have gone away, if he had not been able to leave his affairs in such good hands as yours, Mr. Parchester, and those of your friends."

"Yes," said Miss Airpenny, "and if he had known I was here I dare say he would have stopped to breakfast, and have had a little talk with me. But of course he did not feel himself called upon to explain his comings and his goings to these boys. But I am puzzled now as to what I shall do. I was perfectly willing to stay here a week, or even a fortnight, and take care of the house; but as to staying on indefinitely, that is quite another thing, you know."

"Now, look here!" exclaimed Tom Prouter. "I believe Dunworth would be dreadfully upset if he knew you were going away from here."

"And you would be dreadfully upset," remarked Miss Airpenny, "if you thought I was going back to Quantrill's."

The pupils of husbandry burst into an earnest and appreciative laugh. Tom Prouter said nothing, but went to work vigorously to eat his breakfast.

"Well," said Miss Airpenny, "I shall not go just yet. I am putting the house through a regular course of cleaning, and I shall stay till that is finished. Then we shall see what we shall see."

After breakfast Ardis received a note form Norma, stating that Mr. Surrey had gone back to Bald Hill late on the previous evening, and she, therefore, determined to return to Heatherley immediately. Tom Prouter offered to drive her over in his dog-cart or to borrow a saddle and accompany her on horseback, but both propositions she firmly declined. Ardis did not feel very pleasantly disposed toward Mr. Prouter this morning. It was her

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desire to go away by herself, but in any case she did not wish the company of the man who had hinted that money troubles were the cause of Roger's absence.

When Ardis had taken leave of the kind Miss Airpenny, who greatly disliked to have her go, she did not return to Heatherley by the way she had come, but took her way through a lane which led to the road on which Dr. Lester's house was situated. This was not her most direct way, but Ardis had a reason for taking it. She had not forgotten that the boy had told her early that morning that Mr. Dunworth had returned to his home on Dr. Lester's horse, which had been left in the stables. This proved that the doctor knew something of Roger's movements, and Ardis determined to see Dr. Lester before she went to Heatherley or anywhere else.

After passing between cultivated fields, the lane ran along the edge of a piece of woodland which had been greatly thinned out, so that the ground lay almost as much in sunshine as in shadow. She had not ridden far upon this pleasant roadway when, on rounding a curve, she saw at a short distance a tall man walking toward her. At the sight of him Ardis could but smile. Here was Dr. Lester coming after his horse.

The doctor's eyes had been fixed upon the ground, but at the sound of hoofs he raised his head, and his face was lighted with a sudden joy. But he was surprised as well.

"Miss Ardis!" he exclaimed, stepping quickly toward her, "how do you happen to be here?"

"I spent last night with Miss Airpenny, who is taking care of Roger Dunworth's house, you know. I was detained by a storm. He was there in the night, though nobody knew it until he had gone. And now, doctor, please tell me what you know about him? You do know something, don't you?"

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The doctor looked steadily up at her and answered, "Yes."

Without a word, Ardis released herself from the saddle and stirrup and slipped to the ground. "I will not keep you standing while we talk, doctor," she said, "and if you will tie Janet, we will sit down on that log."

"You need not have troubled yourself to get down, Miss Ardis," said the doctor. "I do not in the least mind standing."

"But I do mind your standing," said Ardis.

The doctor pulled down an oak branch, to which he tied the bridle of the mare; and then the two seated themselves on a part of a trunk of a tree which lay by the roadside.

"Now," said Ardis, "what is it?"

The doctor saw that the girl was deeply interested. He looked away from her, and although the light in his face faded somewhat, there still remained with him that air of kindly concern which was always present when Ardis was.

"I must begin at the beginning," said he, "although I must admit that my mind is more exercised with the present phase of Roger's absence. When he first went away from home I was much troubled because I did not believe that his business affairs, or those of anybody else, had so suddenly called him away. He is not the man to leave his home on business in that manner and say nothing to any one. Something serious must have been the matter with him. Now, as I knew that something serious was the matter with him——"

"What was it?" asked Ardis.

"He was in love with you," said the doctor.

"Did he tell you that?"

"No," said the other, "he did not tell me, nor was there any necessity for telling me. I knew it very well,

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and I also knew that recently his mind had been very much stirred up on account of it. I did not know any specific reason why this should be so, and when I went after him——"

"Do you mean to say you went after him?" interrupted Ardis.

"Yes," said the doctor; "when I found that he had really gone off somewhere, I made special and quiet inquiries at and about the station and I discovered that it was more than likely that he had taken a northern-bound train. In that case I believed he had gone to Baltimore, because his most particular friend, Sydney Gaither, lives there, and I thought it probable that he would at least make a stop at his house. So I took a night train and went to Gaither's, and, sure enough, I found Roger. He looked badly and was, of course, surprised to see me, but, on the whole, I did not hesitate to tell Roger that I had come to Baltimore on his account. When he knew this he frankly told me his trouble. As I expected, it was all about you. Your apparent liking for Surrey, and your refusal to listen to Roger, had affected him a good deal; but he had determined to try to get over this. It was his last meeting with you and Mr. Surrey—the details of which he did not give me—which upset all his resolutions and nearly drove him crazy. Then he went away. He was convinced that he had lost you, and he ceased to care for anything.

"I did not press him with questions in regard to this last meeting, for I saw that he could scarcely bear to think of it, and he had said no more about it than that it settled everything; but I told Roger that I believed, as I truly did, that he was laboring under some cruel mistake, and that he ought to go home, see you, and assure himself with certainty how matters stood between you. Knowing you as I do, and having noticed your avoidance of

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Mr. Surrey after your return from the caves, I was positive that Roger was utterly mistaken in regard to you and that man. Day after day I talked to him, and, at last, he began to take my view of the matter, and yesterday morning he and I started home together.

"I thought it very likely that by this time Mr. Surrey had gone away; but even if he had not, it was right that Roger should see you and have this matter settled. Had he found that his fears were correct, I should not have blamed him if he had thrown up his farm and had gone away, anywhere far from here."

"Should not have blamed him?" exclaimed Ardis.

"No," returned the doctor; "he has told me how he feels toward you. In everything important that he has done in life he has thought of you. This is not a matter of days or months; it is a matter of years. Without you this part of the world would be no place for him."

The doctor paused. "What next?" said Ardis.

"We arrived at Bolton late in the afternoon, hired a carriage at the station, and drove to my house," said the doctor, "and after supper I lent him my horse to ride over to his place. He was to send the horse back, and I was to go to Bald Hill this morning and find out whether or not Mr. Surrey was there, and how affairs stood generally, and report to Roger; after which he was to go to you. My real object in making this plan was to see you before Roger came, and to make the way clear for him if I could. But this morning I received a note from Roger, brought by a boy from Bolton. In this he told me that after he had left me he had changed his mind and had determined to go to Bald Hill to see you. He went there; he did not see any of the family; but he learned that you and Mr. Surrey were at Heatherley. To this he added nothing except that he had gone home; and had started from there

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on a long journey, on which it would be useless for any one to follow him. This note was such a cool and dispassionate one, that it troubled me more than if he had raved a little. He even said that he was sorry that he had forgotten to leave orders that my horse should be brought back to me. As soon as I read the note I started for his house and I am very glad I met you."

Ardis said nothing; she was looking on the ground and thinking. Her thoughts all merged into one overpowering regret. If Roger had only come to his home last evening he would have seen her! No matter where he had come from; straight from Bolton; from the doctor's house; or even after the statement he had heard at Bald Hill, he would have seen her and everything could have been said. When he had heard that she and Surrey were away together, his heart must have been crushed. The bitter conviction must have come upon him that without doubt he had lost her; that without doubt she had deceived him.

But he had not come home until the middle of the night; and then he had gone forth again, seeing nobody, knowing nothing, and passing within a few feet of where she was thinking and dreaming of him! Going with his heart full of despair upon a journey where it was useless for any one to follow him!

Suddenly she turned toward her companion. "Dr. Lester," said she, "you must think a great deal of Roger Dunworth to do so much for him."

"I do think very much of him," he quietly answered, gazing steadfastly before him at the far-away hills.

Ardis looked at him for a moment. "Dr. Lester, she said, "you don't know what a friend you have been!" And with a heart full of tender thankfulness, she half-rose, leaned toward him, and kissed him.

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The tenacity of life possessed by human hope is truly amazing. It can scarcely be said that the hope which had been born of this man's love for Ardis had ever truly lived. It had never been anything but a half-formed weakling. He had honestly believed it dead. But now, as he felt the touch of those lips, that hope sprang in an instant into full life and vigor, and stood before him in exultant majesty. His eyes sparkled, his face shone as though a sudden blaze had sprung into existence within him. But the next instant the light vanished and hope fell dead before him, cold, shrivelled, and never to rise again. That kiss had called it into life only to give it its death-stroke.

"Good-by, doctor," said Ardis, rising; "I must go on now, and I am sure you will let us know if you hear anything more of Mr. Dunworth."

The soul of Ardis was deeply stirred, but she could not speak of the disquiet within her. Indeed, she had not fully made plain to herself its full force and meaning.

The doctor arose, untied her horse, and helped her to the saddle. Then he bade her good-by, and she rode away.

He did not look after her, but slowly walked back to the log and sat down. Now he knew himself as he had not known himself before. That kiss from Ardis had shown him what he truly was. He was an elderly friend of the family.

Given to him thus freely and spontaneously in gratitude for what he had done for the man she loved, it was the same kiss, in its true meaning, as those she had given him when a little girl in gratitude for a handful of nuts or a cunningly carved toy.

This kiss from Ardis Claverden could have but one significance; he was as much older now than she as he

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had been when she was a little girl. If this fact had not before fully impressed him; if he had allowed himself to think that while her years went on his stood still; the fact had impressed her, and she had not thought as he had thought.

He rose to his feet. He was not a more elderly man than when he had sat down with Ardis upon that log; nor had his position with regard to her changed. But now a kiss had stamped his age upon him, and had shown him where he stood.

He walked slowly home, forgetting all about his horse.

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CHAPTER XIX.

WHEN Ardis reached Heatherley she found Norma Cranton in an animated mood. Though strongly desirous of knowing what had happened to Ardis since she had left the day before, she was still more desirous to tell what had happened to her, and began immediately:

"I had a fine time yesterday," she said, "with two of your lovers. First came Mr. Egbert Dalrymple, and much fretted was he not to find you here. He said he would wait until your return, and wait he did, stalking solemnly up and down the parlor, and now and then dropping down upon the piano stool and touching off little bits of tribulation on the keys. As he showed plainly that he had not come to see me, and as I was very busy, I left him to himself. But as I was passing through the parlor in a great hurry with my key basket in my hand, and with two women down-stairs who could do nothing until I went back, and a man from Bolton at the back door who had been waiting half an hour to see me about apples, your Mr. Dalrymple, who was leaning against the mantel-piece with his arms folded and his eyes fixed upon a spot in the carpet, made last year by a popping cinder, stopped me short, with a question. 'Miss Cranton,' said he, 'what is your opinion regarding the condition or status of the human soul immediately after death?' Now, what do you think of such a man? To stop a housekeeper at her very busiest time and ask her a question like that! I looked at him for a moment, and then I said: 'If we can get our souls into the proper condition before death, we shall have done

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all that can be expected of us. What follows will take care of itself.' 'So?' said he, lifting his eyebrows. And with that I left him. And no sooner had I got through with the apple-man than up rides your Mr. Surrey. He also said he would wait until you came back. It was enough to make a cat laugh!

"'There is another gentleman waiting for her in the parlor,' said I, 'so of course, his turn comes first, and it may be a good while before you see her.' He asked who the other gentleman was, and when I told him, he smiled, and said he could afford to wait as long as was necessary. So he tied his horse, but he did not go into the parlor; and when I had finished the quinces I came out and found him on the piazza, comfortably smoking a cigar. He stopped me with a question, too, but it was no stuff and nonsense about souls. You know I never did have any use for Mr. Surrey, but I must say that, taking him right after Mr. Dalrymple, he showed to advantage. I wouldn't have expected it of him, but he really takes a good deal of interest in desiccated apples and all sorts of farm matters. And he knows a good deal, too, which also surprised me. We were still talking together when Mr. Dalrymple came out. He nodded to Mr. Surrey as if his head had been a loose handle to a carving fork.

"'I shall not remain longer,' he said. And he bade me a stiff good-morning. But when he was half-way down the steps he suddenly stopped and turned. 'Will you kindly tell Miss Claverden,' said he, 'that I shall call to-morrow morning about ten o'clock to invite her to drive with me?' And with this he departed."

"It is long after ten o'clock now," said Ardis.

"Oh! he has been and gone," Norma returned. "He did not wait a minute when he found you were not here. I think it likely he has gone to Bald Hill. Mr. Surrey

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laughed a little at the young man after he left yesterday, and then he told me that he was of a different sort, and that if it would not put me to any inconvenience he would remain until you returned. He said he would be obliged to go North this morning, and he did not wish to go without taking leave of you. Of course I could not help his staying, and he stayed to dinner. And I must say that even father, who does not like strangers, said to me that he thought Mr. Surrey a very agreeable gentleman.

"I had a private notion that you had ridden over to Bald Hill, and finding Mr. Surrey away had stayed there to dinner; but I was beginning to be worried about you when your note came. Then I felt all right. I told Mr. Surrey that you were visiting Miss Airpenny, and that on account of the weather you would stay there all night. I am sure if he had known how near you were he would have gone to you; but he must have taken it for granted that you were at Quantrill's where he knew Miss Airpenny lived; and as that is nine miles from here he could not expect to get there before bed-time, even if he knew the roads. At any rate he said nothing about it, and he stayed until long after there was any reason to suppose you would come back; and I could see that he really hated to go away without seeing you. I almost pitied him."

"There was no reason whatever to pity him," said Ardis, "and I am greatly obliged to you for not telling him where I was. I want very much to go back to father, but I shall not go near Bald Hill until I know for certain that Mr. Surrey has left for the North."

"I will send over to Bald Hill this afternoon to find out how matters are," said Norma. "And now tell me if you have heard anything about Roger Dunworth."

"Yes," said Ardis. "He came home last night after

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everybody had gone to bed, and he went away this morning before anybody was up. No one in the family saw him, and though he left a note for Mr. Parchester he did not say where he was going."

"He has gone to stay away," said Norma, "because he will not live in this part of the world without you. I don't know whether you have refused him or whether he has given up in despair on account of your other admirers, but I have been certain all along that it was on your account he went away."

Norma waited a few moments to receive some sort of answer from her companion, but none came, and then she added: "Don't you think, when you put it to yourself, that you are at the bottom of Roger Dunworth's trouble?"

"Oh, yes," said Ardis.

At this moment Ardis was glad that the conversation was ended by the entrance of a servant with a summons for Norma. If she had taken anybody into her confidence it would have been Norma Cranton, but she was not ready to make confidences.

After dinner a messenger sent to Bald Hill by Norma brought news that Mr. Surrey had departed for the North, and although Norma insisted that for the sake of appearances, if for nothing else, her friend should remain with her a little longer, the sun was still high up in the sky when Ardis sprang from the saddle of her mare Janet into the arms of her father.

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CHAPTER XX.

TWO weeks had passed since Ardis Claverden's return to Bald Hill. It was now the middle of October. The sunshine was yet warm and cheery, but the mornings and evenings were growing cool and frosty. The house was lively, for General Tredner and ex-Governor Upton, old friends of Major Claverden, were there on a visit of indefinite length. Dr. Lester was a frequent member of this group of good fellows; Mr. Dalrymple was an almost daily visitor—sometimes seeing Ardis, and sometimes going away disappointed; Tom Prouter drove up in his dog-cart whenever his lacteal duties gave him an excuse to come this way; and even Parchester, Skitt, and Cruppledean occasionally smoked a pipe in the company of the master of Bald Hill.

Twice Norma Cranton spent a few hours with Ardis, but she found her very quiet and uncommunicative; and knowing her friend to be one who chafed under questioning, she prudently avoided making inquiries in regard to the Dunworth affair, feeling sure that when Ardis saw fit to make confidences she would be the one to whom they would be made. It was not a lack of desire of knowledge of such matters that enabled Norma to act thus prudently. The fact was that in her own mind she had already settled the whole matter. Disappointed love had driven Roger Dunworth away. If Ardis should ever give him encouragement to do so he would come back and marry her. If this should not happen, he would probably give up his farm to his younger brother Henry, who was now living in Kentucky, and establish himself on a cattle ranch in

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Texas. If she knew anything of Dunworth blood, it would never permit Roger to settle himself for life in this neighborhood as a disappointed bachelor, or as the husband of any woman but the one whom, as everybody knew, he had loved for so many years.

It was not so easy for Ardis to bring her mind to a satisfactory conclusion in regard to this affair, in which she was so deeply concerned. She went to work in her studio, but art just now did not interest her, and the crackling wood fire which Uncle Shad would build up for her did not seem to prevent her fingers from getting cold and stiff. There were plenty of people to talk to, but their talk was not of the kind to which she cared to listen. So she painted a little, conversed a little, and thought much.

Her thoughts were nearly always upon two persons; Roger Dunworth and herself. With Roger she was not well satisfied. It was true that he loved her; there could be no doubt of that; but he had not treated her well. He had no right to go away and keep away, carrying with him such a dreadful mistake concerning Mr. Surrey and herself. He should have come to her boldly; he should not have been willing to trust anything but her own words in regard to such a thing as this. But, on the other hand, perhaps it was too much to expect of any man to doubt his own conclusions after such apparent evidence had come to him as had come to Roger. It was very hard for her to decide whether or not his conduct was to be justified.

But in regard to herself, she was able to come to a decision, and before the middle of the month she determined that she ought honestly and candidly to acknowledge to herself that she was in love with Roger Dunworth. This conclusion was not entirely pleasing to her, and at first she felt inclined to rebel against it; but she saw that fair play to herself demanded that she should admit the fact.

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Were this not so, it would not trouble her by night and by day to think of the mistake under which Roger had gone away; were it not so, her mind would not be filled with doubts as to his coming back or as to what he might think in such and such a case. She knew that it was not only an old friend and neighbor who had gone away; she knew it was not only her lover who had gone away; she knew it was the man she loved.

When Ardis became fully aware of the position in which she stood her spirits rose. She was a girl to whom action was true life. But the fact that the nature of the case and its peculiar circumstances debarred her from present action did not in the least discourage her. She felt that she was ready to act when the time came, and this feeling gave courage to her spirits and brightness to her eyes, but the reason for this feeling went deep down into her soul and made a new being of her.

That Ardis had become a different woman since their arrival at Bald Hill did not dawn upon the minds of the general and the ex-governor; Egbert Dalrymple, when he had the pleasure of spending a half-hour with her, noticed no change in her; Tom Prouter came to the conclusion that she was growing handsomer every day, but he had thought that ever since he had known her; and when her father said to himself as he looked at her that there never was such a grand combination as that of Ardis and Claverden blood, he was aware of no reason why he should think so more frequently than ever before. It was only Dr. Lester who knew.

An avalanche upon the grave of a dead thing cannot make that thing more dead. The grave in which lay the dead hopes of this quiet gentleman was unmarked by mound or stone, and it was of slight import how deeply it was covered out of sight.

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Toward the end of October, Dr. Lester came one day to Bald Hill, and taking Ardis aside, told her that he had had a letter from Roger Dunworth.

"It is not much of a letter," he said, "and gives no clue to his present whereabouts. It was written more than a week ago at Hickory Hollow, a village in Northern Georgia, and merely asks me to attend to some business for him. I think he is making an equestrian excursion through that country, in which I know he is interested. If I were you," added the doctor, speaking very gently, "I would not allow myself anxiety about Roger. I should not be surprised if he were to return home twenty pounds heavier than when he left us. A tall fellow, such as he is, can well stand that."

"So you think I need not be worried about him?" she said.

"Yes," answered Dr. Lester. "There is no reason to doubt that he is in good health, and I believe that when travel through an interesting country has restored his mind to something of its normal tone he will return, resolved, if necessary, to bear the worst. Once here, I have no fear but that everything will be right."

There came a slight smile upon the face of Ardis. "You think everything will be right?"

"Yes," said the doctor, "I think everything will be right."

The doctor stepped to the window. Then he came back and said: "I shall do my best to get a letter to him. I shall address him at Hickory Hollow, and request that the letter be forwarded from place to place. This may avail nothing, but I shall try it."

"Thank you," said Ardis. And she gave him her hand.

"What!" exclaimed Major Claverden, as he entered the room, "you don't mean, doctor, that you are taking leave of us at this time of day! You must stay to dinner!"

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Dr. Lester had intended to take dinner at Bald Hill, to which hospitable house he was always privileged to invite himself. But as he believed that Miss Ardis would not wish her father to suppose that the hand-shaking between them meant any more than leave taking, he said that he must go, having letters to write which must be dispatched that afternoon.

As he jogged homeward on his cream-colored horse, Dr. Lester's mind was not in that condition of freedom from anxiety which he had endeavored to produce in Ardis. He was greatly worried about Roger Dunworth. He believed all that he had told Ardis, but he had not seen fit to tell her that he feared that it would be a long time before the young man would be content to return home and face the worst. The tone of the letter he had received—which he had not taken to Bald Hill—impressed upon him the fact that Roger had gone away to stay for a long time. Had the letter been of a more emotional character the doctor could have hoped; but its practical nature indicated a fixed purpose which troubled him.

Dr. Lester was a man eminently adapted to attend to other people's business, and he found no difficulty in allaying the apprehensions of Mr. Dunworth's neighbors in regard to his absence. Having heard from him on business, he spoke as his agent, and however much people might conjecture and criticise when they spoke of Dunworth's absence, they saw no reason for anxiety.

As the doctor was sitting writing that afternoon, with his table drawn near to a fire of remarkably crooked sticks, Bonetti came in.

"Evenin', doctor," said the visitor, walking up to the fire and spreading his hands over it, for the day was cloudy and the outside air cool. "Are you writing to Miss Ardis?"

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The doctor put down his pen and arose from the table. He stepped to the mantel-piece, took from it a short brier-wood pipe, and proceeded to fill it from a tobacco-jar near by. "Bonnet," said he, as he pressed the tobacco into the bowl with his forefinger, "the time has come to drop that."

"Do you mean to say," exclaimed Bonetti, his face lighting with interest, "that you have spoken to her?"

"Drop it!" said the doctor.

"No more supposin's?" asked the other. "No more lookin' at it in this way and in t'other way?"

"Drop it!" said the doctor.

"Well, upon my word!" said Bonetti. "I never did think that you, yourself, would be able to drop it!"

"It is to be dropped," said the doctor, "individually and collectively. There is another pipe there."

Bonetti took the pipe and proceeded to fill it. "Of course I'll drop it, if you say so," said he, "but it's like rootin' up a black gum saplin'; it's hard to do. That's a thing you and me has talked about for a long time, doctor."

"And which is to be dropped now," said Dr. Lester, as he puffed gently at his pipe.

Bonetti also stood and puffed. A blank had suddenly come into his life. No more could he join with his fellow-philosophizer in suppositions regarding what might happen to Dr. Lester, if Miss Ardis should do this or that. No longer could he coolly study the phases of this peculiar attachment. Something had happened, and the subject must be dropped. So far as words were concerned, Bonetti dropped it; but for days his mind was filled with conjectures as to the thing which had happened. But although he was an adept at conjecturing, he never conjectured what a kiss had done for Dr. Lester.

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CHAPTER XXI.

IT was at the end of the last week in October that Mr. Egbert Dalrymple came riding down the road which passed the Bald Hill gate at the same time that Tom Prouter came driving up the road in his dog-cart. The young Englishman saw the horseman from afar, and feeling sure that he intended to turn in to Bald Hill, Prouter whipped up and got first to the gate. This was open, and he rattled triumphantly up the lane. He knew who it was that Dalrymple was coming to see; and although he himself had come there to consult the major in regard to the wintering of cows, he resolved to be first at the house. He bounced from his dog-cart and hurried up the steps; but his knock was not immediately answered, and by the time the door was opened Egbert Dalrymple stood near him.

Prouter did not take the time to salute the other, but immediately inquired of the servant if Miss Claverden was at home. Cows and the major had passed out of his mind.

The servant replied that the lady was not at home; and at this moment Major Claverden came out of the library, having overheard the colloquy.

"Walk in, gentlemen! walk in!" he said, shaking hands with each of them. And he ushered them into the spacious room where the general was seated in an easy-chair refreshing himself after a morning walk over the farm.

Egbert Dalrymple bowed to the gentleman, to whom he was introduced; but he did not sit down. "I under-

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stand," he said to the major, "that your daughter is not at home. May I ask when she may be expected to return?"

"I wish I knew! I wish I knew!" said the major, rubbing his hands, and smiling good-humoredly. "It would take a prophet to tell us that. She went yesterday to New York in company with Governor Upton, to visit some friends there; and when Bald Hill will see her again, I am sure I do not know."

Mr. Dalrymple stepped back. His brow contracted, his face darkened. "So!" he exclaimed.

"I beg you will take a seat, sir," said the major, who would not sit down while a guest was standing.

Mr. Dalrymple paid no attention to his invitation.

"For several years," continued the major, "my daughter has spent part of the winter either in Washington or in New York. It is too much to expect of one of her age and tastes to be satisfied to spend the season of bad weather shut up here in the country, with no one but us old fellows—or even you young fellows—for company. But I always expect to have her here for Christmas."

"And like a dutiful daughter, sir," said the general, "I presume she is always here?"

"Oh, yes," was the reply. "We generally get as many young people here as possible for the holidays, and we have a jolly time!"

"There can be no doubt of that, sir," said the deep-voiced general, with another sip at his glass.

Mr. Dalrymple now took two steps forward, and stood, his right leg slightly advanced, his left hand on the back of a chair, his right hand thrust into the breast of his buttoned coat, and upon his countenance a sombre hue such as sometimes comes over the sky just before the storm wind has determined in what direction it will sweep

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everything before it. "Sir," said he, in a tone of quiet incision like the first premonitory whistle from the north, "will you kindly give me Miss Claverden's address in New York?"

The major could not repress a short laugh. "Oho!" he said. "That sort of business is entirely out of my bailiwick. When my daughter wishes any one to have her address she gives it—I never do. The augmentation of the correspondence of a young lady is a very serious thing, sir. And now I wish you would take a seat and have a glass of our morning toddy. It is very gentle, I can assure you."

Mr. Dalrymple drew himself up to his full height. "So!" he ejaculated. Then with a few long, graceful, side-long steps he reached the door, where, turning, he made a low bow, which included all the company. Then he rapidly left the house. On the lawn he found his horse, which he had left to its own control, quietly grazing, with a little negro boy holding the bridle. Advancing to the side of the animal, he stood for a moment gazing upon the ground. Then suddenly extending his right arm upward into the air, he exclaimed: "So!" And, mounting, he rode away.

The negro boy stood for a moment in astonishment. Then he extended his right arm, his torn and dirty shirt sleeve fluttering from his elbow, and exclaimed: "Jist so! Nex' time I hole your hoss, mister, I reckon you'll give me a copper fust."

Egbert Dalrymple had come to Bald Hill that morning with a purpose. It was a purpose born of a sudden inspiration. It had come upon him like a flash that this was the day, this the hour, to unveil before the eyes of Ardis Claverden that peerless creation of passionate adoration which had grown up within him. Fate had

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postponed the ceremony. But he snapped his fingers at Fate. In his soul the roar of the storm wind had already begun.

Tom Prouter had also come to Bald Hill with a purpose. It had been shadowy and undefined, with agricultural sticks and straws showing here and there, but the moment he had seen Egbert Dalrymple coming down the road, this vague purpose had crystallized into a firm resolve to reach Bald Hill before the other fellow got there, and to be the first to see Miss Claverden. Of what he should say to her when he saw her he had had no thought. If he unveiled anything it would probably be the difficulties surrounding his milk route. But he was bound to get there before Dalrymple.

When he first entered the library Prouter had taken a seat and a proffered glass of toddy. And now, although disappointed that Miss Claverden was away, it comforted him to think that the Dalrymple dude was no better off than he was, and he resigned himself to the pleasure of his surroundings, and accepted the major's invitation to stay to dinner.

Ardis' determination to go to New York had been arrived at rather suddenly. After Dr. Lester's latest communication regarding Roger Dunworth she had felt a desire to leave Bald Hill for a time. Generally she much enjoyed autumn in the country, but the season seemed a different one this year. Nature did not interest her. If Roger were really travelling about an interesting country and endeavoring to get his mind into a normal state, she would go to some place which would interest her and get her mind into a normal state. If she were away from Bald Hill this too-passionate young man might sooner return to his home, and at all events she preferred to be away when he came back.

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For years she had had a standing invitation from two friends in New York to make them a long visit; but social demands upon her time when in New York had never allowed her to stay with these friends. Now she determined to go to them.

Mr. and Mrs. Chiverley were artists. With them Ardis knew she could live a life which would interest her. Her decision to visit these friends was made promptly enough, but she would not have acted upon it so soon had not the ex-governor found it necessary to make a trip to New York, and the opportunity of his escort was a very desirable one. She wrote to her friends that she would come to them unless she received a telegram that it would not be convenient; and when the ex-governor was ready to start, she was ready also.

She did not do much in the way of leave-taking. She galloped over to Heatherley, and in the course of her half-hour conversation with Norma the latter bluntly asked her: "And what are you going to do about Roger Dunworth?"

Ardis smiled. "When he comes back," she said, "and I come back——"

"You will give him a good scolding," struck in Norma, "and then marry him."

"It is such a comfort," said Ardis, "to have people answer their own questions! And now, good-by."

Dr. Lester was at the house the evening before Ardis left for the North, and she found an opportunity to say to him that she hoped he would write to her when he heard from Roger Dunworth. The doctor declared that he would most certainly write whenever he heard anything, and hoped he might always write good news.

"You must remember, doctor, you are the only one who knows that I desire to hear from Roger."

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The doctor assured her that he remembered, and that he was very proud and glad that both she and Roger had trusted in him as they had done.

"You are such a true friend," said Ardis, "that neither of us could help trusting you."

The expression "neither of us" came upon the doctor with a little shock, but the effect was only momentary. For some years he had considered a union between Ardis Claverden and Roger Dunworth as an event which in all probability would occur, and which would be satisfactory in the highest degree to the young people and to all their friends. But events which we expect have often an unexpected effect upon us when they happen.

"My dear child," said Major Claverden to his daughter the next morning, as she stood before him in her travelling suit, "I hope you may thoroughly enjoy yourself with your friends and your art; but you must not let any of those young fellows of the North take you away from me. You know that I have the strongest reliance on your judgment in regard to such things, but when I see before me even the dimmest vision of the son-in-law taken from a land of strangers I must have a word to say about it."

"Father," said Ardis, "if you want to be comfortable in your mind, please keep on trusting me in this matter." Then she looked up at the clock. "There are seven minutes yet," she said, "before we need start, and in that time I want to put a question to you. Supposing I were to ask you to choose a husband for me: do you know of any one whom you would be willing to recommend?"

"Husbands be hanged!" said the major. "I don't want you to be thinking of them! But yet, I suppose the thing can't be helped. Well, then, if you were to put the matter into my hands, I should say without any hesitation whatever: 'Here is Roger Dunworth, take him, your old

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play-fellow, your friend and your neighbor, the son of my old play-fellow, my friend and my neighbor. Nothing could be better than that for him, for you, and for me.' Now I have squarely answered your question, have I not?"

"Nothing could be squarer," said Ardis, "and here is Governor Upton, promptly on time."

"Good-by, Bald Hill," cried Ardis a few minutes afterward, as she waved her hand from the family carriage, in which she and the ex-governor, with her father and the general to see them off, were being whirled away to town.

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CHAPTER XXII.

IT has been said that Mr. and Mrs. Chiverley were artists; and it may be added that they were poor artists. It must not be supposed, however, that this remark is intended to indicate a want of artistic merit in the Chiverleys; it applies principally to their lack of money, and also, in a certain degree, to their want of merit. But in this sense their friends agreed that the remark should be made in much gentleness and charity, and not before everybody. The Chiverleys were most excellent and lovable people; and although it was easy enough to see that with more artistic merit they would have had more money, their friends, none of whom were picture buyers, did not allow this fact to interfere in the least with the high estimation in which they held these two good people.

The trouble with Harry Chiverley was that he had nothing in himself which he could put into his work. He could copy what he could see, but if he could not see what he wanted to paint, he had no mental power which would bring that thing before him, or to transform what he saw into what it ought to be. He painted industriously, but as he himself sometimes admitted, his pictures were as hard to look upon as they were to sell.

"What that painting wants," his wife would say, "is vim, snap, spirit, rattle, clatter, go!"

"It is very likely you are right," Mr. Chiverley would say, "and we must see if we cannot put some of those things into the next picture." And to work he would go

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at the next picture, which would be sure to turn out very much the same thing as the one painted before it.

The trouble with Mrs. Chiverley was that she did not know how to paint. With her there was no lack of artistic imagination. Her brain was full of pictures, which, if they could have been transferred to the brain of her husband, who did know how to paint, would have brought fame and fortune. At one end of her brush was artistic talent, almost genius; at the other was a pigment mixed with oil. But the one never ran down to the other. The handle of the brush was a non-conductor.

Harry Chiverley had been a young man for a long time, and he was now beginning to be a young middle-aged man, but there was no sign of even the very earliest middle-age in that charming woman, his wife. He had a thorough knowledge of the principles and methods of art, and was an excellent teacher. It was by his scholars that they lived. But he had plenty of time to paint, and worked indefatigably at his easel. Sometimes a picture was disposed of, but this did not happen often, and was always the occasion of a special Thanksgiving Day. If he had painted better he would have had more scholars and less time to paint, but for a good many years he had shown no sign of improvement except in manual and technical skill. "Vim, rattle, snap, go," never came.

Mr. Chiverley and his wife had passed two summers at Bolton, where Ardis had been one of their pupils. Of course they had experienced the extended hospitality of Bald Hill and well knew the genial character of the major. But this year the Chiverleys had not been in the country at all. The winter had been a hard one with them. Mr. Chiverley had painted a great deal and taught but little; with him the scholar crop had been a short one. As the spring came on their affairs did not improve; and it be-

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came plain enough to both of them that they could not retain their studio, and also go into the country.

"In this case," said Mrs. Chiverley, "we can have no difficulty in deciding what to do. The studio is a necessity, the country is a luxury."

"Not altogether, my dear," said her husband, "for it is in the country that I make most of my studies."

"Still I am inclined to think it is a luxury," she said.

The Chiverleys were very fond of their studio. Like many other studios, it was a large room in the upper part of a great building. It had an excellent north window. If Harry Chiverley gave up that north window he did not know where he would ever get another like it. Opening from this room was a small one in which they slept, and there was also a dark room in which they cooked and kept their stores, their trunks, and all their rubbish. They ate in one corner of their studio, and in another corner which had been screened off to serve for a model-room, but which had seldom been used for that purpose, was occasionally made to serve for a guest-chamber.

The studio was not furnished with the tapestries, the bric-à-brac, the armor, and the various artistic adornments which are usually found in studios. The walls were pretty well covered with Mr. Chiverley's pictures, without frames, and there were some hangings and pieces of furniture which did not cost much and looked well. But against the wall, opposite the north window, stood a possession of which they were justly proud. This was a tall, antique clock which some years before Mr. Chiverley had found in a highly dilapidated condition in a bric-à-brac shop, and had bought for a moderate sum. He was in many ways an ingenious and dexterous man, and with his own hands he put the clock into excellent condition. He cleaned and oiled the works, hung the weights with new cords, and

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made it able to tick out time as steadfastly as in the days of its youth. All damages to the massive wooden case were carefully repaired; the brass-work was cleaned and polished, and for days upon days he and his wife labored with enthusiasm upon the tall structure, scraping, varnishing, and polishing, bringing out the grain of the wood and restoring the tone and color, until the clock stood up proudly like an ancient piece of furniture in perfect preservation, with color enriched and mellowed by every hour whose passage it had chroniced, and not sleek and shining as if it had been furbished at the shop of a furniture dealer.

It was not only a clock which was good to look upon, but it was one which could be depended upon. By daily comparison between it and a chronometer in a watchmaker's window below, Mr. Chiverley regulated it into a condition of truthfulness where it had but few rivals among its antique brethren. It had not been long after the clock had been set going that one night when they had gone to bed, and the lights were out, and the clock had struck the hour, Harry Chiverley said to his wife as the deep, deliberate tones came in to them from the shadows of the studio: "Doesn't it make you happy to think we have a clock like that? He is like a third member of the family; just as much alive as either of us; a true friend, who stays awake all night, telling us the hour and the half-hour, whether we are asleep, or not; and ready even then to inform us about the tides and the moon if we choose to light a candle and go look at him."

"Never in my life," said Mrs. Chiverley, "have I had a desire to know about the tides, or the moon either, strong enough to make me get out of my bed and look at the clock. But is is wonderfully companionable to have him speak to us when we are lying awake in the darkness of the night."

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"Or at any other time," said her husband. "I think it is delightful for him to tell us the time to stop work, and to get ready for luncheon or dinner. Indeed, I truly believe," he added, "that if there should happen to be no luncheon or dinner for us, it would be a compensation to have him tell us that the time for the meal had come. It would make us feel better to know that he had done his part and was all right, no matter what else had happened."

"I think it would be quite the other way," said Mrs. Chiverley; "but you must not imagine I intend to say a single word against the clock."

Early in the summer in which our story opens it happened that the clock summoned the Chiverleys three times a day to meals that were like breakfasts without forks. After that meals became even more simple; and, later, it began to be doubtful in Mrs. Chiverley's mind whether or not the clock, if it had a conscience-wheel anywhere among its works, ought to strike at all at meal-times.

This state of affairs had continued for some weeks, when one day a visitor came into the studio in search of water-colors. He was a gentleman who had a good knowledge of art, and but little money. He wanted something bright, effective, and cheap; and he had been going from studio to studio exciting budding hopes in the hearts of poor artists, and then frost-biting them by leaving and buying nothing.

Mr. Chiverley, with a cheerful alacrity which he endeavored not to make too strongly marked, exhibited to the visitor the water-color sketches in his portfolio or fastened against the wall.

In a corner of the room, in a good light, sat Mrs. Chiverley on a high chair, her feet on the lower round. She was busily painting on a very small landscape in which

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there were a good many houses. She thought it her duty to give all her available time to painting, because it was not right to be idle. She used small canvases because they were cheaper, and she liked to put in houses because they suggested more than trees or the ordinary features of a landscape. Almost anything might be happening in a house.

As the visitor walked about the studio Mrs. Chiverley did not look up from her work, nor speak; but as she assiduously touched a chimney in the same place with the same color over and over again, she listened with all her ears. When the gentleman stopped before a picture, speaking of its good points with apparent appreciation—for Mr. Chiverley's pictures had good points—her spirits would rise, and her imagination would begin to play. There arose before her in turn the vision of a receipted landlord's bill; of something really good for dinner; of a fresh credit opened at the artist's material shop; and once, when the gentleman stopped before an oil-painting —for although she did not turn her head, she watched him carefully from the corners of her eyes—there came up before her a mental picture of a nook in the Adirondacks, with mountain, stream, lake, forest, and clear blue sky, all smiling with sunlit pleasure at being able to furnish such beautiful back, middle and foregrounds to Mr. Chiverley.

But the gentleman found nothing which would suit him. Mr. Chiverley had no bright little sketches, no dashes of inspiration. His pictures were generally large and carefully finished, and although he would have gladly parted with some of them for a very small price had it been offered him, his visitor had a conscience and would not offer a comparative trifle for a picture that was worth a great deal more if it were worth anything. And if he paid more than a comparative trifle, he would like something

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that pleased him better. Mr. Chiverley's work did not attract him.

As he moved toward the door he stopped. "That is a beautiful clock, sir," he said. "Now, that is a clock worth having!" And he stood before it in silent admiration.

Mr. Chiverley turned toward the window and looked out at the sky. "We don't deal in clocks," he said, "but if that bit of old furniture pleases you——"

Mrs. Chiverley still sat on the high chair with her feet on the round, and in her hand she still held her brush; but the houses and the chimneys and the trees and the little bushes were all getting mixed up in a sort of gray mist. At this moment she spoke out clearly and firmly, without turning her head. "That clock is not for sale," she said.

The gentleman now bowed and took his leave, and Mr. Chiverley accompanied him to the top of the stairs. In a few moments he returned. His wife had stopped painting and had pushed back her chair.

"Were you saying anything more to him about the clock?" she asked quickly.

"I merely asked him his address," said Mr. Chiverley as he took his seat before his easel and commenced work. "Some day we may have something which will suit him, and we should always get the address of a possible customer. And now, my dear, let us go bravely to work again. I want you to come and sit for the head of this peasant woman who is standing upon the bridge."

Mrs. Chiverley said nothing, but went and took her accustomed seat in the chair by her husband's easel. When he turned toward her, the hand which held his brush dropped upon his knee, and he sat up straight. Her eyes were full of tears, and there was an expression upon her face which never before had he seen there. It was

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the face of a lovely woman who had borne up courageously against misfortune, but who now was on the point of breaking down. Chiverley gazed at her steadfastly. She did not notice that he was not working, and waited until he should speak to her in regard to her position.

Harry Chiverley quietly arose. He took from his easel his unfinished painting, and placed thereon a fresh canvas. Then gently asking his wife to turn her face toward him, he began to rapidly paint her head, life size. She looked in his direction but did not see him. There were tears upon her cheek, and she was about to wipe them away.

"Don't raise your hand, my dear," he said. "They do not interfere in the least."

"Do you really think we shall have to sell the clock?" she said, in a low voice a good deal broken. "It is one of the family."

Now, as Harry Chiverley looked upon his wife, his feelings had been wound up to such a pitch that he would have sold one of his legs as willingly as that clock. His heart beat fast and his brush moved quickly as he said: "But you know, my dear, we must sell something or we cannot live! The clock is very dear to us. It is a real and a true friend, but it is worth a good deal of money and perhaps we ought to sell it."

This was the first really cruel thing that Harry Chiverley had ever said to his wife, and it deepened the pain upon her face, and brought more tears into her sorrowing, tender eyes. Had she spoken she would have burst into weeping. Harry Chiverley could never have imagined such loveliness infused by grief; but he could paint it when he saw it. And paint it he did; faster, and with more earnest fervor than ever before. She sat looking at him without seeing him, and thinking he was painting the peasant woman upon the bridge. Each moment it seemed as if

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she would throw herself upon her husband's bosom and weep her heart out. It was not only the clock; it was everything. She knew they had no right to anything!

Mr. Chiverley's eyes flashed from her to the canvas. He painted faster than ever. Presently he sprang to his feet. Without dropping his brush, his palette or his maul-stick, he fell on his knees before his wife and folded her in his arms.

"Darling!" he cried. "We shall not sell the clock! We shall sell that picture!"

"They never did buy them," sobbed his wife, her face upon his shoulder. "There are already three of them with the woman and the bridge."

"Angel! Exalted being!" he cried. "Queen of clocks, studios, and the whole world! Look at that!" pointing to his easel with his brush. "When I have put in the hair and the drapery and the background, that will be the picture which shall lift us out of every trouble."

"It is in enough trouble itself," she said, coming round to the easel and wiping her eyes. "I do believe it is intended for me!"

"Dearest!" exclaimed Mr. Chiverley, "I have traded upon your sorrow. Out of your grief I shall bring you joy. I never had such a model before! That picture will sell!"

"Do you mean to say," she said, "that you spoke as you did to make me look that way?"

"Not to make you look so," he answered, "only to keep you so until I caught the angelic woe. And now," he cried, as he sat down before the canvas, "for joy, peace, rapture!"

"Beef and butter," added his wife with a slight but hopeful smile upon her face. She could see that if he did not spoil it by working on it too much, this would be the best picture her husband had ever painted.

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Until dusk of the long day Harry Chiverley painted, and early the next morning, and all that day he was at it again; and on the next day it was finished. He would have liked to work a little more upon the face, but he was afraid to do it without a model, and his wife earnestly entreated him not to touch it. As she looked upon her face, shadowed by grief, but illumined by the faint light of her expiring courage, she felt almost happy. This was a good picture. If Mr. Chiverley could find models with spirit, vim, snap, sparkle already in them he would succeed, but he could not supply these things himself.

This picture was very soon sold to a dealer for a moderately good price, which, however, would have been larger had the reputation of the artist been proportionate to the merit of the picture.

"Angel of my heart!" cried Harry Chiverley as he skipped around his studio, waving a check over his head. "Happiness dawns! Joy blossoms! My true artistic career has begun!"

And, like the good, industrious man that he was, he sat down to work at the woman on the bridge.

The meals of the Chiverley's now became regular breakfasts, luncheons and dinners; the receipted landlord's bill was a reality, not a vision, and the clock spoke out the hours and half-hours in a voice that assured them he was there and intended to stay.

But, notwithstanding this improvement in their circumstances, the Chiverleys did not feel that they were able to go into the country that summer. The past demanded so much of their little horde that the future must be content with less than its proper share. They, therefore, bravely made up their minds to stay in town and be as happy as the thousands of other good people who had to do the same thing. There was a fine circulation of air in

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the studio when all the windows were open, and Mr. Chiverley sat in this breezy coolness and painted from old sketches and farm memory, landscapes which were like fashion plates for the use of Dame Nature; if she wanted to know the latest shapes in mountains, or the newest autumnal colors in trees or reflections, there she had them.

In these long summer days Mrs. Chiverley liked to place her easel where she could look through their little bed-chamber, and out of its open western window. Opposite this window, on the other side of the street, was a large room at the top of a tall building in which men worked in wood, apparently making boxes. At the back of this room was a western window, and when this was open Mrs. Chiverley could look straight through the shop, and far, far away, she could catch a glimpse of the Palisades and the New Jersey hills on the other side of the Hudson. There she could see the dim outline of trees against the sky, and it often pleased her to take little rests and to lean back in her chair and let her fancy go out of her chamber window and through the box maker's shop to that far-off bit of real country. She knew that there were pleasant shades beneath the trees, and that not far away there must be a house, most likely a true little farmhouse, with great oaks about it, and white hens pecking in the green grass; and, beyond that, long, meadowy slopes with gray fences and a winding lane which led into a wood, where there was a stream and rocks and deeply-shaded spots. From day to day these quiet scenes became more real and familiar to her, until she could have told you what kinds of wild flowers grew by the side of the winding lane, and where you could find the pleasantest rocks on which to sit and sketch. She was always sorry when the sun got so far round to the west that one of the

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workmen pulled down the shade of the back window, and shut out her summer day in the country.

The money for the sold picture had nearly ebbed itself away, and the Chiverleys were again feeling very poor, though still brave and cheery, when Ardis Claverden's letter came stating that she was about to pay them a visit.

"There is something so oddly absurd in our having a visitor at this time," said Mr. Chiverley, "that I feel inclined to laugh at it. But of course she must come. It would go hard with me after reading that letter and remembering how we have been entertained at Bald Hill to telegraph to her that we could not have her. But I do wish that she had planned to visit us in palmier days."

"But we must not think of that," said Mrs. Chiverley, "and if I were you I would go and telegraph to her that we shall be too glad to have her."

"That will cost something," said her husband, "and it is not really necessary."

"Don't think of that," she said. "It will be much more cordial to let her hear that we expect her, than to let her imagine so from not hearing."

"But what are we going to do with her?" said Mr. Chiverley.

"We must settle that after you have telegraphed," answered his wife.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

THE day on which Ardis Claverden was expected was a very busy one for the Chiverleys. Painting was entirely set aside, and although this was a thing they were very much opposed to, being systematic as well as industrious workers, they decided that under the circumstances it was reasonable to allow themselves this break in their ordinary routine; and, in fact, they both very much enjoyed it. The rooms were cleaned, dusted, and "spruced up;" the pictures in which Ardis was likely to take interest were brought to the front; and the brasses of the clock were freshly polished. Their own chamber was prepared for the visitor, while their sleeping quarters were established in the screened-off corner of the studio which had been used as the guest-room on occasions when some artist friend from the country happened to spend the night with them. They had expected to make this present arrangement when they first invited Ardis to visit them, and it was not in relation to the guest-room that Mr. Chiverley had asked: "What are we going to do with her?"

"It seems to me," said Mrs. Chiverley when everything she could think of doing had been done, "that Ardis ought to find herself comfortable here. To be sure, everything is very different from what she is accustomed to at Bald Hill, but I believe she will like that. It would be stupid enough if we always found abroad just the sort of thing we are accustomed to at home."

"If it is difference she wants," said Mr. Chiverley, "she

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can find it here to her heart's content. I am not sure, however, that her craving for variety will be appeased by the nondescript meals which are served up in this studio."

"If they should be good nondescript meals they will suit her very well," said Mrs. Chiverley, "but what they are going to be I am sure I do not know. But we must do our best, and at all events I am very glad that we did not telegraph to her not to come."

"And your consort is equally so," said Mr. Chiverley, "and let us not grieve over the subject of refreshments. Hitherto our custom has been to divide what we have by two; let us divide it by three, and the thing is settled."

The husband and wife had scarcely shaken hands over this settlement when there was a knock at the door, and in a moment Ardis was with them. She was alone, for she had insisted upon parting with the ex-governor at the street door, and she had arrived an hour before she expected. But had she come in the midst of their cleaning and polishing, the Chiverleys would have given her the warmest and wildest of welcomes. The weather was cold, and she wore furs. The Chiverleys had never seen her in furs, and she dawned upon them with a new beauty; and Ardis was as delighted to be there as they were to have her. Before she took off a single wrap she walked around the studio and looked at every picture, and when she was introduced to the clock she declared she would shake hands with it. But Mr. Chiverley was of the opinion that such an act of condescension would either make the clock too forward, or humble it by giving it a sudden set-back.

"That is not a very good joke," he said, "but the clock and Mrs. Chiverley are used to that sort of thing, and I hope you will not mind."

"Mind!" cried Ardis. "I have heard you make a great many worse ones at Bald Hill."

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The evening was a lively one. Ardis was in her gayest spirits, and delighted the souls of the Chiverleys with bright bits of news from Bald Hill and anecdotes of the negroes. Bald Hill was the king of homes to the Chiverleys, and they knew all the negroes, and had sketched most of them. When the clock with twelve firm but kindly strokes told them it was time that they all should be in bed, they were amazed at the lateness of the hour.

The next morning, after breakfast, Ardis sat at Mrs. Chiverley's little desk writing to her father. The letter seemed to require a good deal of consideration, for she frequently leaned back in her chair, the pen idle in her hand, and her eyes fixed upon the picture which happened to hang in front of her. But the letter required no thought whatever, and she did not notice the picture; she was thinking about the Chiverleys.

She was surprised to find her friends so poor. She had known that their style of living was more artistic and picturesque than domestic; but she had not imagined that it was associated in any degree with deprivation. But now she saw that this was the case. They offered no excuses or apologies; and, indeed, supposed that the little shifts they made for the benefit of their visitor would be unnoticed by her. Ardis, however, had taken but two meals with them, when it became perfectly plain to her that they had been denying themselves in order that she might have enough. Mr. Chiverley had gayly told her that he seldom sold any pictures; and had spoken of the slow way in which scholars came in. It was evident that they were very poor, and that she ought not to impose another burden upon them.

But she did not wish to leave these friends. She had planned to make them a good visit. She enjoyed their society, and desired with them to become better acquainted

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with the art and the life of the metropolis. She knew, furthermore, that it pleased these good people to have her with them.

It would be easy enough to better their circumstances. If Mr. Chiverley should sell a picture a period of ease would arrive to the simple life of their household. Ardis could well afford to buy a picture, and she would be glad to do it. She was aware of the limitations of Mr. Chiverley's art, but there were some of his pictures which possessed a peculiar value to her, for they were from studies made at Bald Hill. But she was conscious that it would never do for her, at this time, to offer to buy a picture. Her hosts would be sure to know why she did it. And if she went away they would also see her motive, and their sensitive spirits be wounded.

An idea came to her; she considered it a few moments, and then hastily finished her letter to her father. She now wrote a note to ex-Governor Upton, in which she desired him as soon as possible after three o'clock that afternoon to come to the studio of Mr. Chiverley, of which she gave the address, and to look at his paintings. Among the few framed pictures he would see one, hanging in a conspicuous position, which represented her studio at Bald Hill, with Uncle Shad and the ox-cart near by. He could not fail to recognize it, as the details were so faithfully given. This picture she desired him to buy at whatever price the artist might set upon it. As soon as possible she would see him, reimburse his expenditure, and explain the proceeding. She directed this note to the ex-governor's hotel; and declining Mr. Chiverley's offer to post her letters she went out, put her father's in a letter-box, and sent that for the ex-governor by a messenger.

Soon after luncheon Ardis carried off Mrs. Chiverley on a pilgrimage among the shops. She did not in the least

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mind taking her hostess from her work; the little lady was benefited, and art did not suffer. Mr. Chiverley, of course, remained at home, for it would never do for them both to go out in the day-time and lock up the studio. And it was very well that he thus attended to his interests, for about ten minutes past three o'clock he had a visitor. This was an elderly gentleman, of tall and portly figure and urbane and gracious manner. The moment he entered the studio, there was a general blossoming of hopes in the heart of Mr. Chiverley. This man looked as if he meant business, and he was a stranger. When Mr. Chiverley sold any of his works, it was always to a stranger.

"My name, sir," said the visitor, "is Upton, and this, I presume, is Mr. Chiverley." And he extended his hand. "As a friend of the Claverden family, I am happy to know you, sir. I have been requested by Miss Ardis Claverden, who is visiting you, and who I imagine is not within doors on this beautiful day, to call upon you, sir, and purchase a certain painting which she described to me in a note she sent me this morning, and which I think I can identify without difficulty." And putting on his eye-glasses, he began to walk about the room and look at the pictures.

"Miss Claverden asked you to come here and buy a picture?" exclaimed Mr. Chiverley.

"Yes, sir," said the ex-governor. "The scene of it is laid at Bald Hill, and I think I shall be able to point it out to you in a few minutes."

Harry Chiverley stood silent. This gentleman had been requested by Ardis in a note sent this morning to come here and buy a picture! The whole affair was as easy to see through as the Venetian goblet at which he was vacantly gazing. Their guest had been able to perceive thus soon that they were really not able to entertain her, and she had taken this method of assisting them. In

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one way it was a legitimate method, for it was his business to sell pictures, and it was but a friendly act to get him a customer; but Mr. Chiverley did not doubt in the least that Ardis Claverden intended to pay for this picture herself. She might want it, perhaps, but, for all that, it was an act of charity. Had she not believed it would be so considered, she would not have thought it necessary to employ an agent in its purchase.

Ex-Governor Upton's manner of examining pictures was very slow and deliberate, and it gave the artist plenty of time to think. The announcement made by his visitor had come upon him like a dash of iced water, but now the reaction began to set in, and the chill of the charity was gradually succeeded by a glow of grateful admiration for the kind-hearted girl who had thought of doing this thing. He knew that she had intended it as a most delicate act of friendship; and that in doing her errand, this elderly gentleman had bungled.

Mr. Chiverley was so sure that this conclusion was correct that he stepped up to the ex-governor, and said: "I think I can show you the painting you are looking for, sir; but before doing so, let me ask you if Miss Claverden, in her note to you, requested that her name should not be brought into this transaction?"

Mr. Upton turned suddenly and gazed fixedly at the artist; then he put his hand in the side pocket of his coat and drew out a note. "I brought this with me, sir," he said, "on account of the address. I will look at it."

He did look at it. He read it through. Then he turned it over, and found some lines written at the top of the first page. These lines read thus: "Please do not let Mr. Chiverley imagine that I sent you. Indeed, I should like him to think you never heard of me."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed the ex-governor. "This

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injunction, placed in a most conspicuous position, entirely escaped my notice. I am accustomed to find nothing but an address and a date at the top of a letter, and so left this unread. I declare, sir, I am afraid I have put my foot into it!"

"Honestly speaking," said Mr. Chiverley, "I think that is what you have done, sir."

"What can I say, sir," cried the ex-governor, "to express my dismay and distress at this unfortunate occurrence? I see now that the young lady desired me to come here as a stranger and buy the picture."

"That is exactly what she intended," said Mr. Chiverley, "and now, sir, the only thing we can do is to keep to ourselves all knowledge of this mistake. It would sorely wound Miss Claverden, should she know what has happened. I will accept the situation. I know that she likes this picture, and my pictures are for sale. I know also that she buys it at this time because she knows that my circumstances are not flourishing. But I much prefer to be humiliated than that our warm-hearted young friend should suspect a jot of what has happened."

"Sir," said the ex-governor, stretching out his hand, "you are a gentleman to the backbone! This most unfortunate outcome of my mission is due entirely to my own stupidity. I offer you my most humble apologies, and I entirely agree with you that nothing should be said of my inexcusable blunder, and that we should proceed with the business as Miss Claverden intended."

"Very good," said Mr. Chiverley, endeavoring to throw something of his ordinary good-humor into his manner. "And don't make apologies, I beg of you, sir. We will drop all that, and look at this thing as the straightforward piece of business it was intended to be. This is the picture you are looking for."

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The ex-governor took off his eye-glasses, wiped them, put them on again, and stepped up to the painting indicated. "Yes, sir," he said, after looking at it attentively, "you are right. Here is Miss Claverden's studio; here is the negro man with his team of oxen and his wagon; and here is the very grass that grows about the mansion of Bald Hill. It is an admirable picture, sir--most admirable! I do not wonder that Miss Claverden desires to have it! And now, sir, what is the price you ask for this work of art?"

Without hesitation Mr. Chiverley mentioned the price he would have asked of any ordinary buyer; and the ex-governor drew out his pocket-book and paid the money.

Anxious that the painting should leave the studio before the return of Ardis, Mr. Upton sent for a messenger and had the picture carried to his hotel. "It shall hang in my room, sir," he said, "while I remain in New York; and when I leave, it shall be boxed and sent to its destination."

Mr. Chiverley laughed. "Now," he said, "it almost seems as if you were really the purchaser of the picture."

"That is the way to look at it," said the ex-governor. "It was intended we should so look at it, and we should do it. All the rest should be blotted from our recollection. I bid you good-day, sir, and I am very glad indeed to have made your acquaintance."

When the two ladies returned, they found Harry Chiverley sitting on a high stool in the middle of the room, his arms folded, and on his head a tall silk hat.

"You must excuse this hat," he said, addressing Ardis. "It is not my custom to wear it, especially in the house; but, as Mrs. Chiverley knows, I always put it on when I have sold a picture."

"Sold a picture!" cried his wife, while Ardis turned around to lay her hat upon a table.

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"Yes, ladies," Mr. Chiverley said, still sitting upon his stool, "I have to announce that during your absence I have sold one of the works of art which formerly adorned this gallery. You had been gone perhaps an hour, when a fine old gentleman, all of the olden time—I know he was Southern from his intonation—came in and asked to look over my pictures. He seemed to be endowed with a remarkable appreciation of art. As a proof of this he bought one of my paintings. As might have been expected, he chose a Southern subject; and, by the way, it was one of the Bald Hill pictures."

During this address, Mr. Chiverley kept his chin well up in the air with the manner of a man whose worth had been duly recognized, occasionally glancing from one lady to the other, but addressing his remarks impartially to the space between them.

Ardis bore the ordeal well. Her face was somewhat flushed, but it could be considered no more than natural that she should thus show her pleasure at the good fortune of her friends.

Mrs. Chiverley was in a tremor of delight. "What was his name?" she cried. "Who was he?"

"Would you believe it," said Mr. Chiverley, suddenly bringing down his chin, "I never asked him! And what is more, he had a messenger called, and sent the picture off to his hotel."

"That was very considerate of good Mr. Upton," thought Ardis. "He certainly managed the matter well! It was most prudent in him not to give his name!"

"Oh, I am so sorry you did not get his name!" cried Mrs. Chiverley. "Every picture sold should be entered in a book with the name of the purchaser and all particulars. You might want to trace it."

"Bless your soul!" cried Mr. Chiverley jumping down

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from the stool and taking off his hat, "I would much rather paint another picture than trace that one! And now, madam, I am going out on some business. Is there anything I can do for you?"

There were a great many things he could do for her, and when Ardis had gone to her room, Mrs. Chiverley mentioned some of these, and poured out her joy meanwhile. "Nothing more fortunate could happen to two deserving people," she said. "To think that we should sell a picture at this moment! Ardis must wonder that we are so full of delight, but she cannot appreciate what a momentous thing it is for us to sell a picture! And what did you get for it?"

When Mr. Chiverley told her she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him.

"Thanks!" he said. "There is no better way of stamping a transaction with approval. And now, my dear, what shall I get for dinner? It must be something jolly, already cooked."

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CHAPTER XXIV.

THE little family at the studio was now a very happy one. Mrs. Chiverley bloomed like a June rose in the warmth and light of pecuniary sufficiency, and Mr. Chiverley having eased his mind by the decision that this money which had come from Ardis should be used, as far as possible, for her benefit, allowed his spirits to rise as high as they pleased; and being used to lofty flights, they arose to a great altitude and staid there. What his wife sometimes gently alluded to as super-hospitality, he considered strict justice, and they lived merrily.

Ardis, too, was happy. What she had done, and its effects upon her friends, had, of course, a gladdening influence upon her. And, besides that, she greatly enjoyed her life in New York. With one or the other of her friends in the day-time, and with both of them at night, she visited studios and art exhibitions, and many interesting places besides. And as for society, they had all that they wanted, for both she and the Chiverleys had friends among the best people in New York.

In regard to Roger Dunworth and his relations to her, her mind had now grown to be at ease. When he came home he would find out that he had made a terrible mistake about Mr. Surrey; and if he did not find out this for himself, she was quite sure that both Norma and Dr. Lester would help him to the discovery. Then when he spoke again—and she did not in the least doubt he would speak again—she would have her answer ready. There was no reason for impatience, if there should be a

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certain delay in the settlement of this matter between Roger and herself. She hoped he would take plenty of time after his return to fully satisfy his mind concerning his mistake. Then, and not before, would he have a right to speak.

Ardis had been with the Chiverleys about a month when, one afternoon, on her return from a walk with Mrs. Chiverley, she found a letter from Dr. Lester. It was a long letter, and she took it into her room and sat down to read it.

The doctor began by saying that he had hesitated a good deal before writing this letter; but that as he had promised that he would give her all the information in regard to Roger Dunworth that he himself should receive, he felt it his duty to keep his promise, be his news good or bad. He had received a letter from Roger Dunworth which was a strictly business epistle and related to the forwarding of money to the writer at Atlanta, toward which city the doctor supposed him to be making his way. Breeville, the village where this letter was written, had probably infrequent mails, for Roger's letter had lain for some days in the post-office; and the postmaster had written a message on the back of it to the effect that the young man who had posted that letter had got into trouble; and that if he had any friends some of them ought to come down and see about him. The doctor's impulse had been to instantly start for the place himself, but as this was not practicable, he had telegraphed to the station nearest Breeville, to which village his message had been forwarded, asking the postmaster for full particulars of Roger's difficulties.

He had now a letter from said postmaster, in which he stated that Mr Dunworth had been at that place for about a week, riding around the country all day in an

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apparently aimless manner, and returning to the tavern at night. This method of action had excited the suspicions of the neighbors, for a band of horse-thieves had recently come into that part of the country, and it was supposed that this shabbily dressed stranger, mounted upon a remarkably fine horse, might be a confederate of these men, and that his trips about the country were for the purpose of collecting information. Soon after this matter began to be talked about, a valuable horse was stolen from a farm about ten miles from Breeville, toward which Dunworth had been seen riding the day before. The depredations of the horse-thieves had become so daring that a vigilance committee had been formed in the county to capture and make short work of them. The postmaster added that Dunworth had evidently found out that suspicion had been directed against him, for he had gone off, nobody knew where. This flight had made the committee feel sure he was guilty, and they were now in pursuit of him, and, if caught, it would probably go hard with him.

Dr. Lester wrote that he had not mentioned the matter to Major Claverden, for if he should know of Roger's trouble he would start off for Georgia immediately; and the doctor did not think that Ardis' father should be allowed to encounter the hardships, privations, and perhaps dangers, which such a journey would entail, without her knowledge and consent.

"I am trying to arrange matters," the doctor said in conclusion, "so that I may go down there very soon. I hope to hear from you before I start."

At the bottom of the letter was a postscript in pencil. "Have just received a telegram from the Breeville postmaster. He says: 'Not caught yet. I will stand by him if possible.'"

For ten minutes after finishing reading the letter, Ardis

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sat steadily looking at it. Then she got up, and stepping quickly into the studio put on her wrap, which she had thrown over a chair when she came in.

"Going out!" exclaimed Mrs. Chiverley.

"Yes," said Ardis, "my letter requires an immediate answer. I am going to the telegraph office."

"Let me attend to that for you," said Mr. Chiverley, rising.

"Oh, no, thank you," replied Ardis. "I shall be back in five minutes."

When Ardis left the studio, she had not yet composed her telegram, but before she reached the office it was prepared. It was to Dr. Lester and ran thus: "Do not start South. Meet me at Woodbridge Station, Wednesday, 15th, afternoon. A."

When she came back the studio was lighted, and Mr. and Mrs. Chiverley were in a state of anxious solicitude.

"Has anything happened?" cried the latter. "Ardis, you are looking positively pale."

"Dear friends," said Ardis, "after dinner I will tell you everything. There is no bad news from Bald Hill, but I have heard something which demands instant consideration."

"I hope it is nothing that will take her away from us," said Mrs. Chiverley, when Ardis had gone to her room. And in this wish her husband most earnestly joined her. It would have destroyed their appetite for dinner if they could have read the telegram Ardis had sent.

The meal was a quiet one, and when it was over the three friends took their usual seats by the studio fire.

"I did not want to say one word," said Ardis, "until I had fully settled in my own mind certain important matters which have been suddenly brought before me. It is so much easier to talk about a thing when you have de-

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termined what you are going to do." And then she told them all what Dr. Lester had written.

Her hearers were shocked. They both knew Roger Dunworth and liked him much, and the terrible danger that hung over him, or had perhaps already overtaken him, would have bitterly afflicted them, even if they had not seen that Ardis was so deeply interested.

"What ought to be done? Is there anything that can be done?" cried Mrs. Chiverley.

"Some of his friends must go to him," said Ardis, "vouch for him, and support him. An utter stranger in that wild country, he has no chance at all by himself."

"What friends?" gasped Mrs. Chiverley.

"Myself, for one," said Ardis.

"I thought so! I was afraid of it!" cried Mrs. Chiverley, bursting into tears. "O Ardis, dear Ardis, don't think of it! Don't dream of it! It will be terrible! It will not be right. It is not to be thought of that you should go down there."

"By no means," said Mr. Chiverley. "You do not know the dangers of such an undertaking. And, besides, my dear girl, I am bound to say to you that nothing you could do in that way would be likely to be of any avail. Whatever danger threatens Roger would most likely overtake him long before you could get to him."

"Oh, I have thought of that! I have thought of that!" said Ardis. "And I have considered every possible thing that could be done for Roger. A certificate of character could be sent to the postmaster who is interested in him, but Roger is far away from Breeville now, and I doubt if such a paper can be of any use; and what Dr. Lester has already written ought to be sufficient if his letter could be made use of. But no trust can be put in this, and we must go down to him."

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"We! Who?" exclaimed Mrs. Chiverley.

"I for one," said Ardis. "It will be perfectly useless to try to dissuade me. I could not stay here and feel that people were making mistakes, or giving up when they should go on and on and on! If I can't do things I can see that things are done. Dr. Lester will go with me, I am sure. But he is not enough—I want a lady with me. I want you two to go. Don't look so amazed! Don't say a thing until I have explained! It will be a very good thing for you to go South this time of the year, and you have had no vacation. I must pay all expenses because it is my affair. Oh, my dear friends, I do so want you to go with me!" And she laid a hand upon each of them.

"Go? Of course we will go!" sobbed Mrs. Chiverley.

"My dear Ardis," said Mr. Chiverley, and although he did not sob, his voice was husky, "we would go to the ends of the earth with you, if our going could be of the least benefit; but I do not think that a journey to Georgia by us three will be of any use whatever. What is done should be done promptly and instantly. It is a long journey, and after we were there it might be a good while before we would know what to do, or could do it. And, besides, this sort of thing will probably cost more than you suppose; and although we would not think for an instant of expense at such a time if we had the money, the fact is that we haven't it, and it would not be right for you to furnish it."

"Please don't talk in that way!" cried Ardis. "Those things are trifles and ought not to be considered! If anything can be instantly done for Roger, let it be done. Write, telegraph—anything! But that must not interfere with our going to him; and I do not believe that we shall necessarily be too late. Roger is quick-witted, and can ride as far and as well as any man, and with the start that

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he has had it will not be easy for the vigilance committee to come up with him. If he can reach Atlanta, or any large place, it is likely he will be lodged in jail, and perhaps that is the best thing that can happen to him; and when we get there it will all be right. But, whatever happens, go I must! And you two must go with me! That is what I was thinking about during dinner, and I fully decided it before I left the table. Don't talk about money. I wouldn't allow you to spend it if you had it. That is a thing of no account."

Mr. and Mrs. Chiverley looked at each other. "All right, Ardis!" said Harry Chiverley. "We will stand by you and we will do whatever you say. You shall never think that misfortune came to you because these two friends failed you. Now what is to be done? And when?"

"I have telegraphed Dr. Lester," said Ardis, "that I shall be at Woodbridge Station to-morrow afternoon."

"Woodbridge Station?" repeated both the Chiverleys.

"Yes," said Ardis, "that is a railroad station about six miles this side of Bolton. And now I will explain to you the whole of my plan. I do not wish my father to know anything of this expedition. In the first place it would dreadfully worry him, and in the second place he would insist upon going with us; and most positively that must not be. The one thing father has to avoid is exposure in the winter-time. I shall write to him that I have gone on a short tour with you to the South, and that we shall stop at Bolton on our return. I must see Dr. Lester. And he lives not much further from Woodbridge than from Bolton. I wish to pass through Bolton unobserved, and if the doctor should meet me there it might attract attention. It would never do for my father to know that I had passed through Bolton without stopping. I fully expect the

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doctor to go South with us, and I must send him another telegram to that effect."

"And when must we start to do all this?" asked Mrs. Chiverley.

"At twelve o'clock to-night," said Ardis, "and we shall reach Woodbridge to-morrow afternoon."

At this statement Mr. Chiverley pushed back his chair with a start, and Mrs. Chiverley opened her eyes very wide. "The dishes are not even washed!" she exclaimed.

"My dear Mrs. Chiverley," said Ardis, "if we do not start to-night, we lose a whole day. And there is plenty of time to get ready. It is barely eight o'clock, and that gives us over three hours before we need leave this house, and that is quite time enough for everything."

"We shall have to skip around in a lively manner," said Harry Chiverley, "if we expect to take a midnight train."

"I don't think we shall have to skip much," said Ardis, "if we go to work systematically. In the first place I shall ask you, Mr. Chiverley, to go out and send a telegram for me to Dr. Lester. I want to tell him to meet us at Woodbridge prepared to go South with us. And while you are out you can buy our tickets. I think it will be better for us to go straight to Atlanta; and if Roger has not reached there when we arrive, we can then decide what we shall do. There is a hotel at Atlanta which I have heard father speak of, called 'Didman's,' and you can tell the janitor to forward our letters to that hotel. Please engage berths in a sleeping-car, and order a carriage to come for us at eleven. That will give us a margin if we are not quite ready. While you are out, Mrs. Chiverley and I will wash the dishes and put things generally to rights, and then we will all go to packing. I shall take my small trunk, and twenty minutes will be enough to pack

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that. Then I shall have time to write a letter to father which we can post at the station."

"Trunk!" cried Mr. Chiverley. "For such an expedition I should think that a bundle on the end of a stick, or at most a small hand-bag, would be what each of us would want."

"Not at all," said Ardis. "We are going to Atlanta, and it may be necessary, for Roger's sake, for us to make a good appearance there. So we must have clothes, and you and Mrs. Chiverley must take your sketching things."

"Good!" said Mr. Chiverley. "And, after all, it is easier to pack a trunk and check it than to carry a bundle on a stick."

"And just as cheap," said Mrs. Chiverley.

When Mr. Chiverley returned from his errands he stamped his feet and shook himself outside the studio door before he entered. "Do you know," said he, as he came in, "that it is snowing like Sam Hill?"

"I don't know how Sam Hill snows," said Ardis, who was busy tying up a portable easel, "but if real winter weather is coming on we ought to be very glad that we are going South. The carriage will certainly come, snow or no snow, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes;" said Mr. Chiverley; "there will be no trouble about that. But while I was out I remembered that there are people in this metropolis who ought to know of my departure. It does not do for a man of business like myself to vanish suddenly between two days without letting any one know about it."

"Of course not," said Ardis, "and you can sit down and write notes to all of them. There is plenty of time, for Mrs. Chiverley and I will attend to the packing."

"Yes," said Mrs. Chiverley, who was just entering the room with an armful of miscellaneous articles. "It is

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almost done now. And I never should have supposed that I could have received notice after dinner that we were to close up this establishment and go South, and that at half-past nine we should be almost ready to start!"

"There is something of the lively bounce in it, even to me," said Mr. Chiverley. "And do you think, my dear, that it would be well to write to Stolger and tell him he need not hurry with that last frame I ordered?"

"By no means," cried his wife; "that would be a very bad precedent. No matter how long we stay away, you may be sure the frame will not be finished when we get back."

"I am very glad," said Mr. Chiverley when Ardis was not present, "that she seems to keep up her spirits so well."

"As long as there is anything for her to do," said Mrs. Chiverley, "her spirits will be all right. And so would mine be if it were not for the fear that no matter what we do, we shall be too late."

"Banish such thoughts," said Mr. Chiverley. "Now that we have enlisted in this cause, do not let us have a doubt about it. It is plain enough," he continued, "that everything has been settled between these two young people."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Chiverley, "I have long supposed that."

All preparations were made in time for the little party to partake of a supper, in which they endeavored to eat up everything that was left in the house; and when the trunks had been carried down, and Mrs. Chiverley was shutting the door behind her, she turned and said, "Good-by, dear clock. Don't go on too long striking to yourself by day and by night."

And as they went down-stairs the imaginative little woman could hear the clock say in clear, sonorous tones: "Good-by-dear-friends-the-best-of-luck-go-with you!"

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CHAPTER XXV.

WHEN, on the next morning, the Chiverleys and Ardis Claverden reached Washington, they found that beautiful city as white as its monument, and the snow still falling. They continued their journey and were much surprised, to find the snow deeper and deeper as they progressed southward; so that they reached Woodbridge Station two hours behind time.

"It has nearly stopped snowing," said Ardis, peering through the window as the train slowed up, "but I am dreadfully afraid Dr. Lester will not be here! However, I ought not to be, for he is a man to be trusted in any weather. Yes, there he is, buttoned up to the chin! And there is Cream-o'-Tartar, harnessed to a wagon. I never saw that horse in harness before."

The train had scarcely come to a stop before Ardis was out on the platform, and in a moment she was vigorously shaking hands with Dr. Lester.

"Are you ready to go on with us?" she asked. "You received my last telegram?"

Instead of answering her the doctor said: "Your friends are with you, I suppose?"

"Yes, here they are," said Ardis, as the Chiverleys appeared on the platform.

The doctor hastily greeted them, and said: "You must all get off the train. Let me help you bring out your hand baggage. If you have trunks it will be better to let them go on."

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"What is the matter?" cried Ardis. "What does this mean?"

"The road is blocked up beyond here. The train ahead of this has not been able to reach Lynchburg. It will be useless to stay on this train; it cannot proceed much further, and there is no knowing what privations you may be subjected to."

"But what shall we do? Where shall we go?" exclaimed Ardis, while the Chiverleys stood in silent amazement.

"I have provided for everything," said the doctor; "the point at present is to get off the train. I asked the station-master to detain it a few minutes."

The doctor's manner was so decided that no further questions were asked, and the travellers, with their portable baggage, soon stood on the station platform.

As the cars began slowly and laboriously to move on, Ardis's troubled face was turned toward them with such an anxious and wistful air that it might have been supposed that she was about to spring back upon them and press on at all hazards toward the wilderness of Georgia. "It is too bad!" she exclaimed. "I believe we ought to have staid on the train!"

"No," said the doctor. "I have had plenty of time to consider this matter, and I think you will soon agree that I have acted properly. This snow-storm came from the southwest, and it has been snowing in the mountains for forty-eight hours, and the tracks are entirely blocked up. I have seen telegrams from various points, and know that travel over this road cannot be resumed for a day, perhaps two, after the storm ceases. We shall lose no time by waiting until the road is open. And you need not be anxious, Miss Ardis, for I have had another telegram from my postmaster, and he tells me that the committee has

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returned unsuccessful. The telegram ends with: 'No news of your friend.' That means, of course, good news."

"Good? Yes, perhaps it is," said Ardis, "but we must get to him as soon as we can!"

"Certainly, certainly," said the doctor, "we shall do that. But I have a strong hope that by this time Roger is in Atlanta, or very near it. And when he is there he is safe. But unless we have direct and good news from him, we shall go on as soon as the road is open."

The doctor's words brought a degree of comfort to Ardis. "Well," she said, "what can't be done, can't be done. But as soon as anything can be done we must do it. And now, may I ask, Dr. Lester, what we ourselves are to do? I do not wish to go to Bald Hill."

"If I had had any notion of that," said the doctor, "I should have allowed you to proceed to Bolton on the train."

"What I should like to do," broke in Mr. Chiverley, "would be to find out if there is a fire in that little station. If this is your 'sunny South,' give me the shaded North."

By the glowing station stove Dr. Lester explained his plans. "I was in Bolton last night," he said, "and I there became quite sure that no trains would cross the mountains to-day, and I therefore made arrangements to take care of you good people until you could go on. I would not be so cruel as to let you stay on the train, and perhaps be snowed up at some point where you would be half-frozen and find nothing to eat."

"And what are you going to do?" asked Ardis.

"I am going to take you home with me," said the doctor.

At this announcement Ardis laughed, and Mr. Chiverley, who knew the doctor's method of life, and had smoked many a pipe with him in his oddly-furnished room, could not help following her example. Mrs. Chiverley did not think this proceeding very polite, but she was so pleased

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to see that Ardis could laugh that she abstained from comment.

"You need not suppose," said Dr. Lester, smiling, "that I am going to shut you up in my crowded den. I have prepared accommodations for you in the old house."

"Why, that was burned long ago," said Ardis. "I thought it was nothing but ruins."

"Ruins!" exclaimed Mrs. Chiverley. "Will that be safe?"

Mr. Chiverley was delighted. "I remember that place," he said. "I have sketched it from all points. It will be jolly to stay there! And ruins, my dear, are ever so much safer than new buildings. New houses are continually getting destroyed in some way or other, but ruins last forever."

"What is left of the house," said the doctor, "is perfectly safe, and there are two rooms in good condition on the ground-floor. But I am not going to say anything more about my hostelry. There is no rival house, and you will be obliged to go with me."

"Go with you!" said Ardis. "To be sure we will. And what are we to go in? That wagon?"

"Yes," said the doctor; "I borrowed that spring wagon of Tommy Deans, and I reckon old Cream-o'-Tartar will pull us through."

"It might have been better," said Mr. Chiverley, as he came out of the station and gazed at the wide expanse of white around him, "if you had borrowed a sleigh."

"Sleighs are very uncommon about here," said the doctor. "Our snows generally last so short a time that they would be of little use. But wheels will go through snow better than through deep mud, and I think we shall get on."

The party was soon seated in the open wagon, and the

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journey of five or six miles was begun. They could not expect to travel rapidly, but the ground was frozen beneath the snow, and many parts of the road had been partially cleared by the wind, so that Cream-o'-Tartar was able to jog along at a slow trot. On the way the doctor further explained some of his arrangements.

"It will be a regular picnic," he said. "We shall have to do our own cooking, and everything. I have sent away the colored people who waited on me, for they could not be trusted to keep the secret of my entertaining guests. The snow frightened them, and they were glad enough to go away and huddle up in the cabins of their friends. I went to Bolton this morning and laid in a stock of provisions, and so I think we shall not suffer."

"Suffer!" cried Harry Chiverley. "Not to be thought of! A winter picnic! And in a ruin! This is truly jolly! Hurrah for the sunny South!"

"Is the house so burned," asked Mrs. Chiverley, "that there can be no further fires?"

"Oh, no," said the doctor. "There is a good one there now if it has not burned out. I will engage to keep you warm enough, though in other ways you may not be satisfied."

"Given food and warmth," said Mr. Chiverley, "we will let everything else go."

It had now stopped snowing: there was but little wind; and, well wrapped up, the travellers enjoyed the keen, frosty air; and had they been bowling along in a sleigh with jingling bells the trip would have been a delightful one. Ploughing slowly through the snow in an open spring wagon was quite another thing. But they were all people of good courage and willing to accommodate themselves to their conditions.

After a mile or two they turned into a branch road

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which ran in the direction of the doctor's house. Their way now led them directly through a forest of oaks and chestnuts, varied at intervals by low growths of evergreens and tall pines. The scenes through which they were passing were of such rare beauty that the travellers broke into exclamations of delight. The ground was all covered with pure unbroken snow, and every long branch of evergreens and every tree and bough and trailing vine bent in graceful curves beneath a heavy edging of sparkling whiteness. Lines of pure white beauty were all around them, crossing, interlacing, and standing out in delicate relief against the patches of blue which now appeared in the western sky. The sun, well down toward the horizon, shed over everything a pale rosy light, and tipped, besides, many a bending branch with frosty points of gem-like color.

"I have imagined fairy-land," said Mrs. Chiverley, "but now I have seen it!"

Dr. Lester stopped his horse, and turning around he said: "If there are any fairies who live in these woods in the winter, I wish they would now appear and show me the road. No vehicle has been this way since the snow fell, and to me any wide space between the trees seems as much like a road as any other space."

"Did you not come from your house by this road?" asked Ardis.

"No," said the doctor, "I went from Woodbridge to Bolton, where I had been to get the latest news. I really do not know whether I ought to go to the right of that big oak, or to the left."

This information was disconcerting, and the Chiverleys forgot the beauty of the scenery.

"Why, doctor," cried Ardis, "I thought you knew every foot of this country!"

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"So I do," he answered, "under ordinary circumstances, but a country covered with snow is a new thing altogether. In coming through these woods I have always followed the road. But where is the road now? It has disappeared utterly."

"Perhaps we may meet some one who will show us the road," said Mrs. Chiverley.

Ardis shrugged her shoulders. She did not want to meet anybody; and the doctor said: "There is not a house within a mile of us, nor a foot-print in this snow."

Mr. Chiverley proposed that they should go back to the station—they could find the way there by their own tracks—and then proceed to the doctor's house by the way of Bolton.

"Oh, that would be a long, long journey," said the doctor, "and I doubt if my horse would be equal to it. And, besides, we do not wish to go through Bolton, do we, Miss Ardis?"

"No, indeed!" said Ardis. "And then straight past the Bald Hill gate! Oh, never! I think the very best thing you can do, doctor, is to let your horse find the road for himself. Of course he knows the way home, and he is more likely to keep in the road than to go out of it."

"He has been over the road often enough," said the doctor, "but if he is as bewildered as I am it is not likely he will remember anything about it now."

"Let us try him," said Ardis. "There is nothing better that we can do."

"Very good," said the doctor, dropping the reins on the dash-board. "And now, Cream-o'-Tartar, we put our destinies into your hands, or, rather, your feet. Get up!"

The horse started, and, without hesitation, passed to the right of the big oak tree.

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"I believe he is on the road," exclaimed Ardis. "See! There is a perfect avenue stretching itself before us."

"Yes," said Mr. Chiverley, turning his head from side to side. "And if there were not similar avenues extending themselves in various directions, I should feel certain that we were on the road."

Dr. Lester, who was not used to driving, nor to sitting cramped up in a vehicle, now drew his gloves from his half-frozen fingers, and put his hands in his pockets. If his horse would do his own driving he was more than willing to let him do it.

"This is one of my oddest experiences," said Mr. Chiverley. "To proceed through fairy-land under the sole guidance of a medicinal preparation is something to be remembered!"

After a time Mrs. Chiverley said: "It begins to seem to me as if Cream-o'-Tartar were wandering at random among the trees."

This remark was emphasized by Cream-o'-Tartar suddenly taking a sharp turn to the right, and covering the party with a shower of snow from some down-bent evergreen branches. There was a startled scream from the ladies, and Dr. Lester, his eyes blinded with snow, shouted: "Whoa!"

The horse stopped.

"I knew it would be so!" cried Mrs. Chiverley. "If you leave him to himself he will dash us to pieces."

"I don't believe it!" said Ardis. "This is as much like a road as any other place. Let him go on, doctor."

The doctor started the horse and on they went. Trees stood all about them, on either side, and even in front; but among these dark trunks, little and big, without striking one of them, Cream-o'-Tartar slowly made his way.

The sun was now low and it was beginning to be dusky.

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The doctor remarked that the moon would rise in a couple of hours, but this did not appear to comfort anybody.

"I believe this horse has no idea where he is going, and is walking merely to keep himself warm," said Mr. Chiverley. "I should like to get out and follow his example."

"Don't think of such a thing, Harry!" exclaimed his wife. "You will get your feet wet and soaked and perhaps frozen."

"And cut off," added Mr. Chiverley. "Thank you. I will remain in the wagon with alacrity."

The responsibility of the comfort and perhaps the safety of his friends began to press upon the doctor. It was getting dark, and the situation was grave. What to do the doctor did not know. It was as well to let the horse go his own way as to turn him in another direction. All ways seemed equally to lead into the heart of the woods.

Tears were in Mrs. Chiverley's eyes, but she turned her face away from Ardis. Nothing could be more dreadful than fairy-land! Even the beauty that had made the present scene more terrible to her. There was no beauty now; everything was cold, pale, spectral, and awful!

Even the courage of Ardis began to give way. At any moment their progress might be stopped. What could they do for a fire? What could they do for anything? Would it be possible for Dr. Lester to procure assistance?

Cream-o'-Tartar now pulled the party up a slight ascent and then he turned into an open space.

"A clearing!" cried Ardis. "Whose can it be?"

"Clearing!" exclaimed the doctor. "Do you see that mass of trees in front of us? That is where I live. This is the high road. Cream-o'-Tartar has brought us through, without making a mistake!"

"Hurrah for the good old physic!" cried Mr. Chiverley. And, without a word, his wife fell crying upon Ardis' shoulder.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

"I COULD not have supposed," said Mr. Chiverley, as he awkwardly got down from the spring wagon in front of Dr. Lester's little house, "that my legs could get themselves so uncommonly stiff. The effects of semi-tropical air are truly wonderful! But I thought you were going to take us to those ruins, doctor. Have you changed your mind?"

"Not at all," said Dr. Lester, who was now on the ground. "But you must first come in here, and get yourselves warm."

The party were soon clustered around a great bed of embers in the fire-place. An armful of brushwood upon these soon made a crackling blaze; and then Dr. Lester left them to thaw, as he termed it, while he went over to the other house to attend to the fires there.

"Don't forget dear old Cream-o'-Tartar!" cried Ardis. "Give him his supper before you do anything else. I wish I had a pound of sugar to give him, to show my gratitude. But I will prove that some other time."

Cream-o'-Tartar's wants were soon attended to, and the party around the fire perceived through the window Dr. Lester, hard at work with a big hoe, making a path through the snow from his door to the remains of the old mansion-house.

Mr. Chiverley seized his hat. "He must not do that all by himself," said he; and hurrying out of the door with the stiffness entirely departed from his legs, asked the doctor for something with which he could help him.

"I could not find anything but this old hoe," said the

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other, "but if you choose to take it, I will go in and build up the fires."

It was now so dark that Mr. Chiverley could scarcely follow the footprints which the doctor had made. But the path was finished as the doctor came out, and then the two went back for the ladies.

In a few minutes the little company, preceded by the doctor with a lantern, reached the back piazza of the old house. When the doctor opened the door they entered a large kitchen with a wood fire blazing in an enormous fire-place.

"Here," said Dr. Lester, "is where we shall cook and eat. Next to this is what used to be the dining-room. The little furniture we saved from the fire was put in there; and in a closet are stored away a lot of pillows and blankets and sheets, which I leave to you ladies to make use of. There is a small room opening from that which my uncle used as a study. It is pretty well dismantled, for I have taken all the books over to my place. But there is a large couch there on which Miss Ardis can possibly make herself comfortable. My accommodations are pretty rough, but I think you will be better off here than in a snowed-up train."

When the doctor had lighted his lamp and had shown his rooms, his guests were surprised that the old ruin should still contain such apartments.

"Pretty shabby," said the doctor, "but occasionally I have had some one here to sleep, and from time to time I have put the doors and windows in order."

"I call this truly jolly," said Mr. Chiverley. "I wonder, doctor, that you do not come over here and live yourself, and have three rooms instead of one."

"Thank you," said the doctor, "but I prefer staying where I am. My room is large, and my house has a good

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roof to it. I reserve dilapidations for my friends. And now, if you please, we will go to work and get our supper."

Four persons better adapted to a gypsy style of housekeeping could scarcely have been found. The doctor had laid in a good supply of provisions. The coffee was soon boiling, the ham frizzling, bread toasting, and eggs slipping from shell to pan. Mrs. Chiverley was charmed with the great open fire-place and the iron cranes on which to hang pots.

"A true artist," she said, "should always cook at a fire like this."

The table was spread with the doctor's stock of crockery, and though the gentlemen sat upon a barrel supported by two boxes, no cooks ever ate a meal of their own cooking with more relish, nor were louder in its praises.

After supper a great fire was built up, and the little party gathered around it, and the doctor went over to his house, quickly returning with a demijohn and a small jar.

"A ruin like this," said he, "is incomplete without spirits, and I have here some old peach brandy, which when I pull out this cork will fill these gloomy halls with the invisible ghosts of departed fruit."

At this sentiment there was a general hand-clapping, and Mrs. Chiverley wanted to know what was in the jar.

"Honey," said the doctor.

"And what do you do with honey?" she asked.

"I will show you," was the answer. The doctor thereupon produced four glasses, and put into each a small quantity of the liquid honey. Then he poured in peach brandy and stirred up the mixture. "Now," said he, "you shall taste our celebrated 'peach and honey,' which the present generation does not know much about, but which, better than anything else, will keep off the effects of a long drive through the snow and cold."

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"Doctor," said Mr. Chiverley, when he had taken a few sips, "I now begin to feel as if there was such a thing as the sunny South."

The feelings of vexation and disappointment which this enforced stoppage had caused to Ardis had now nearly disappeared. The doctor seemed so hopeful about Roger and in such good spirits that her natural disposition to look upon the better side of things was encouraged. Had she known that the doctor's pleasure in having her for a guest, in ministering to her wants, and in any way promoting her comfort, would have put him in good spirits, no matter what damages were threatening other people, she might not have been so much encouraged.

When the ladies had arranged the bedrooms, and the gentlemen had had a smoke before the kitchen fire, the doctor bade his guests good-night, although it was still early in the evening. When he had gone, the others remained around the hearth, unwilling to leave the glowing blaze. Suddenly Ardis sprang to her feet and put out the light.

"Why did you do that?" exclaimed the Chiverleys in a breath.

"Hush!" said Ardis. "I saw through the window two men ride up to the doctor's door. It would never do for anybody to see a light in here. We should have thought of that and have closed the shutters, if there are any."

The doctor was astonished and somewhat alarmed when he opened his door, and the light of his lamp fell upon Messrs. Skitt and Cruppledean.

"You didn't expect any visitors on a night like this!" cried Skitt. "But it is jolly being out with the snow, and the moon, and all that."

"Come in, gentlemen, come in," said the doctor, endeavoring to conceal his anxiety.

"Before we go in," said Cruppledean, "I want to tell

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you, doctor, that there is somebody in that old house. I saw a light there, and it was suddenly put out. That sort of thing means no good, and if you will give us each a club we'll go over with you and help you rout out the beggars—tramps most likely."

"Come in, gentlemen," cried the doctor earnestly. "There are no tramps hereabouts, and if any unfortunates have taken refuge in those ruins, I shall not disturb them to-night."

"Very good of you," said Cruppledean, reluctantly entering. "And most likely they'll break into your house to-night."

"No fear of that!" said the doctor, closing the door. "Sit down, gentlemen, and warm your toes. Nobody will take the trouble to break into my house."

"That may be," growled Cruppledean, "but if I were in your place I wouldn't go to bed until I had found out who the sneaking rascals are."

"The way to properly put yourself in my place," said the doctor, smiling "is to sit down, and take a pipe."

The three men sat down before the fire, but Cruppledean did not seem to enjoy it. His features wore an air of discontent, and with his elbows on his knees he puffed vigorously at his pipe and said nothing.

"Doctor, when did you hear from Dunworth?" asked Skitt. "You seem to be the only person with whom he has any communication."

"The last letter I received from him," said the doctor, "was the one of which I spoke to you. I judged from that, as you may remember, that it was his intention soon to return."

"I wish he would do it," said Skitt. "Our meals are getting worse and worse, and we can't stand it, you know. If Dunworth doesn't turn up soon, I shall get old Miss

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Airpenny to come back to us. And if old Miss Airpenny comes the servants vow they will go. And then we'll have to get in a new lot. And there's no knowing what sort they'll be—thieves, most likely. When you write to Dunworth, I wish you'd tell him that."

The doctor smiled, but before he could answer Cruppledean broke his silence. "Now really, doctor," he said, "I don't think you are acting fair by your neighbors. "It's not half an hour's walk from here to Dunworth's, and the tramps that take up their lodgings in your old ruins are more likely to go to our place to do the stealing than to do it here. Come, now, let's each of us take a stick of this firewood and go there and rout them out." And he pushed back his chair.

"No, sir," said the doctor. "If Judas Iscariot and Bill Sykes were in that house, I would not rout them out on a night like this."

Cruppledean gave an unintelligible growl, pulled up his chair to the fire, and fell again to puffing in silence.

Skitt now began to send more messages to Dunworth, and these became so many and so varied that the doctor expostulated.

"If I go into all those particulars," he said, "I shall have to send him a treatise."

"Oh, I don't believe you'll mind telling him all that, doctor," said Skitt. "It runs along together, you know, and he ought to know it."

"Doctor," said Cruppledean, suddenly, "one thing you really should do. You ought to go over there and see if those beggars have any matches, about them. If you don't take away their matches, as like as not they'll set fire to that old place, and burn down your house as well."

"I am not afraid," said the doctor. "That old house has been burned as much as it ever will be."

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"Well, then," cried Cruppledean, impatiently, "may a man go over there and take a look at the rascals so that he'll know them if he sees them prowling about his place? I am not afraid to go by myself."

Skitt now arose. "Come on, Cruppledean," he said. "It is time for us to go home. Don't bother your head about tramps. And it's as like as not you didn't see a light over there, anyway."

"Yes, I did," said Cruppledean, doggedly, as he went out to his horse.

The doctor stood at his door until the two men had ridden out of the yard; and then he went back to his fire.

When they were out on the road Cruppledean turned to his companion. "Skitt," said he, "let's ride back to the other side of that old house, and see who is in there."

"Come on," said his companion, "and let the old house alone. Now, really, Cruppledean, haven't you any sense in your skull? Couldn't you see that Dr. Lester *knew* who was in that house?"

"Why didn't he say so, then?" said Cruppledean.

Skitt laughed. "Because he didn't want anybody else to know. But I know."

"Really?" cried Cruppledean.

"Yes," said the other. "I could see it by the way the doctor spoke and acted. It's Dunworth!"

"Dunworth!" cried the other. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Skitt, "that he has never been away at all, but has been hiding in that house all the time, and Dr. Lester has been keeping him posted about what has been going on. That is the reason I sent him all those messages. Of course I didn't expect the doctor to write them."

Cruppledean threw back his head and laughed with such vigor and suddenness that his horse started. "This

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is a go!" he cried. "Now, look here, Skitt, isn't this just like these Americans?"

"Well," said Skitt, "there are other people besides Americans who do that sort of thing. I have read of a man in London who went away from his wife and family, and wasn't heard of for twenty years; and all that time he was living in a house just across the street, and watching his family through a telescope."

"Do you suppose Dunworth is doing that?" asked Cruppledean, angrily.

"Oh, no," said Skitt; "he isn't that kind, and I don't believe he will stay away for twenty years, either. I think what I said about letting the servants go and filling up the house with a pack of thieves will fetch him!"

Cruppledean was now highly amused. "Do you know what I've a mind to do?" he cried. "To-morrow I'll ride over there, going round by the back where the doctor won't see me, and I'll walk straight into that old house without knocking, and I'll say to him: 'Mr. Dunworth, would you bring the young cattle up to the cow-yard so that they can all be fed together in this weather, or do you wish to still keep them apart?' It'll be great fun to see how he looks when I say that to him, just as if I had known all along that he was there."

"If you know what's good for you," said Skitt, "you'll let Dunworth alone. And, what's more, don't let us say a word to Parchester about this. He has been putting on airs lately, keeping an eye on things as if he expected to come into the property. And it will be great fun when he finds out that all the time Dunworth has been keeping an eye on him."

"It's larks!" cried Cruppledean. "And we'll shut up like oysters before old Parch!"

For an hour Dr. Lester sat by his fire, but steadily look-

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ing out of the window over the snow-covered ground to the back of the old house, for he had suspicions concerning the young student of farming. When he felt satisfied that Cruppledean would not come back he went to bed.

This act had been performed long before by his guests without any light except that afforded by the moon.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

THE next morning the sky was bright, the sun was warm, and there was a great thaw. Everywhere the snow was softening and melting and dripping, and trickling away in little streams wherever it could find a channel. It was like early spring to Mr. Chiverley, who was not familiar with the South in winter, and he stood at the back door of the house and sniffed the mild moist air. When Dr. Lester came over to breakfast he did not express much gratification.

"It means mud about a foot deep," he said, "and great discomfort in getting about, and after the roads have all been cut up into deep ruts and holes, they will be frozen hard, and one might as well travel over an upturned curry-comb. Our winters are very fickle."

"Do not call this winter," said Mr. Chiverley. "A woman is as old as she looks, and the season is what it seems. Please do not disturb that philosophy. I am expecting the smell of violets when the snow melts from that little mound."

"If the smell of fried ham does not prove attractive enough to make you come in," cried Mrs. Chiverley, "please close the door."

Very soon after breakfast Dr. Lester mounted Cream-o'-Tartar, and rode to Bolton to find if there was any chance of the travellers continuing their journey that afternoon. He came back with the information that the roads over the mountains were still blocked, but it was confidently expected that trains would go through the next day.

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"Very good," said Ardis; "we will go over to Woodbridge Station to-morrow, and if the train comes we will take it. And remember, doctor, that you are to be one of the party. Positively we cannot go without you!"

To be shut up in a kitchen of a half-burned house on a fine, bright day like this was irksome to the Chiverleys; but walking was almost an impossibility, and it was, besides, desirable that they should not show themselves. The doctor brought over a lot of old novels, and with these they quieted their impatient souls.

Ardis did not care to read, and she spent most of the morning looking out of the window. It might be a strange thing for her friends to be shut up in this place, but she felt that it was a very much stranger thing for her to be here! But little more than a mile away in a straight line, though much further by the road, a piece of rising ground was topped by a mass of trees, their bare topmost branches showing plainly against the sky. That was Bald Hill. There was her home; there was her father; here was she. Tears filled her eyes as her soul reached out itself toward her father. And yet if she went to him she must give up the enterprise of love and duty which she had undertaken. She did not fear that her father would forbid the continuance of her journey, but she knew that when he understood its object he would go with her. This must not be.

In the afternoon she saw the doctor standing in the open door; and, after looking out to see that no one was on the road, she wrapped herself in a shawl and ran over to him.

"There is no one to see me," she said, "and if there were I don't believe I should be recognized with this shawl over my head. People might think I was Betty, your cook."

The doctor smiled. "Or a wagon-load of corn fodder," he said. "You look as much like one as the other."

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Ardis laughed, and began to walk round the room.

"Do you remember, doctor," she said, "how I used to go about this room when I was a little girl? And the room does not seem to have changed at all, except that some things look a little older."

"Alas!" said the doctor, "some things will grow old."

Probably he would have moralized a little more had not Ardis uttered a sudden exclamation. She had stopped before a pair of small top boots which hung against the wall, well worn and somewhat dusty.

"Why, doctor!" cried Ardis, "I positively believe that these are my riding-boots!"

A blush so deep that it showed itself through his tanned and weather-beaten skin rose to the doctor's face, but he was behind Ardis, and she did not see it. "Yes," he said, coming forward, "they are your boots. Old Miles, who had them to mend, brought them here one day and asked me to carry them over to you, he having one of his rheumatic fits; but the patches he had put over those cracked places were so rough and coarse I did not believe that you would wear the boots, and I had intended doctoring them a little myself before I took them to you."

"You!" exclaimed Ardis. "You mend my boots!"

"Yes," said the doctor, with a constrained laugh. "I like that sort of work. With an adhesive substance I have I can put a patch on a boot so that it will scarcely be noticed."

"I am very glad you did not do it," said Ardis. "I would not like to think of such a thing as your mending my boots. Those patches are quite good enough for the country in bad weather;" and then continued, "by the way, doctor, I should like to have those boots now. They are good and thick and will keep my feet dry in this weather much better than those I have on."

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"You should stay in the house as much as you can, Miss Ardis," said the doctor, "if you don't want your friends to stop here and call on you. But if you are discreet you can take a little fresh air without being noticed, and I will bring the boots over to you."

Ardis soon ran back to the old house, and when she had gone the doctor took down the boots, brushed off the dust, and then proceeded to carefully anoint them with a waterproof preparation from a stone bottle. As he sat at work rubbing the oily fluid into the pores of the leather with a patience and intelligence which could not be expected of any servant of that region he remembered his curious thrill of pleasure when the old, rheumatic cobbler put those little boots into his hands. He also called to mind how he had afterward looked with indignation at the coarse patches, and how the happy thought had come to him that he would himself cover with smooth, neatly fitting bits of leather these cracks in the boots of Ardis; how he had paid the old cobbler and had hung them up in his room; how day after day he had looked on them and resolved that on the morrow he would begin the true labor of love, and that, although she would never know it, he would with his own hands do something that would be of service to Ardis. He remembered, too, how he never had begun his task, knowing that when the boots had been put in proper order they ought to be returned to their owner and feeling each day more and more reluctant to part with them. And now Ardis had seen them, had suspected nothing, and was going to tramp about in them a little at the back of the old house, and if not one drop of snow-water penetrated through the leather it would be due to the loving earnestness with which he rubbed in that compound.

Ardis thought that the doctor was a long time coming

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with the boots; but after he had brought them she enjoyed her tramp down a smooth walk of unbroken snow in the garden of the old house, made secure from observation by a hedge of evergreens; and not a drop of snow water came through the leather to her feet. And when she came in she lent the boots to Mrs. Chiverley, who was well pleased to lay by her novel for a breath of outer air.

It was ten o'clock that night when the little party retired to their rooms, but even then Ardis did not go to bed. She sat at her window looking out over the landscape. The moon, somewhat past the full, was shining brightly and far away lay Bald Hill, with its fringe of treetops against the sky.

For half an hour she sat and looked out. Then she got up and listened. All was quiet in the old house. She looked across the yard; the doctor's little home was dark. Now she began to busy herself. The room was lighted only by the moon and by a faint glow of embers from the hearth, but she was able to find what she wanted. She took off her shoes, and replaced them with the riding boots which the doctor had so carefully anointed; she put on a thick jacket, and over that a dark waterproof, the hood of which enveloped her head. Then she stepped quietly to the window, raised it, looked this way and that, and, with an ease that showed that this was not the first time in her life that she had done such a thing, she got out of the window, dropping gently upon the snow, but with sufficient force to make a light crushing sound. Fearful that this might have awakened the Chiverleys she stood still for a moment and listened. But hearing nothing to indicate that the slumber of her friends had been disturbed she quietly pulled down the window and made her way across the yard, keeping as far from the doctor's house

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as possible. When she reached the road she crossed it, and climbed the fence on the other side, and then started straight across the fields toward Bald Hill. The night was cold and frosty, and the snow which had been melting all day was covered with a crust which, however, was not strong enough to bear the weight of Ardis, whose feet broke through it at every step. But it was not deep, and on the ridges and higher portions of the field, which had lain all day in the sunshine, the snow was almost gone, although the tangled dead grass and the stubble often made her high boots of as much service to her here as in the snow.

Straight on she went toward the rising ground on which stood her home. When she came to a fence she climbed it; in the lower places where the snow was deepest she crushed boldly through it. Once she came to a deep gully and felt obliged to go around the head of it, but reaching another and a shallower one, she stopped for a moment and seeing how far it extended on either hand she gathered her waterproof tightly about her, slid to the bottom, plunging into snow which came nearly to the top of her boots, and then briskly clambered up the opposite bank, finding it necessary, however, to occasionally use her hands.

She continued her course, now through the apple orchard, then over the lawn, and among the great oaks which stood about the house. All was quiet, almost deathlike. Heavy shadows alternated with wide spaces of moonlit snow. Nowhere a sign or sound of life. Major Claverden kept only hunting dogs, and these in such weather were safely housed in a distant barn. Midnight intruders were not expected at Bald Hill.

A path had been cleared around the house, and on this Ardis stepped noiselessly to the front piazza and ascended

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the steps. There was a window at one end of the piazza which opened into the library and which was seldom fastened, for when there had been smoking in that room her father liked to slightly lower the upper sash. She opened the shutters and, as she hoped and expected, she found she could raise the lower sash. Lifting it slowly she clambered into the room, and slipping off her boots she stepped quickly to the fireplace where a great mass of coals twinkled in thousands of little stars through the white ashes that had been piled over them. Here she sat down and warmed herself. Her vigorous exercise had put her body in a glow, but her hands and face were cold.

She would not have enjoyed so much the gentle heat coming from this banked-up bed of coals had she known that the man who had followed her from the old half-ruined house all the way to Bald Hill, keeping at a discreet distance, but never losing sight of her until she had entered the library window, was now standing on a bit of bare ground behind one of the oak trees on the lawn stamping his feet, and beating himself with his arms to keep from becoming chilled. This man had heard the slight crunch made by the breaking of the snow-crust when Ardis had dropped from her bedroom window. He had seen her cross the yard, and he had divined her purpose. As quickly as possible preparing himself for a walk through the snow, he had followed her that he might protect and help her in case there should be need for it; but intending not to intrude himself upon her unless there should be need. Once, when she slipped down into the gully, accidentally as he thought, he had rushed forward to her assistance, but she so quickly scrambled up the other side and continued on her way that he understood what she had done and followed her example when he reached the gully. Shivering and stamping he would stay

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outside until she reappeared, or until he felt assured that she had no intention of reappearing.

The little white hands that were spread out over the fire of hot ashes were soon warmed, and then Ardis arose, and with noiseless tread stepped out of the open library door into the hall. The moonlight coming in at a window over the landing of the stairway, enabled her to see her way, and she quietly went up stairs. The door of the front room on the right of the upper hall was slightly ajar, and through it came a long line of pale light. This was her father's room; the door was never entirely closed, and in it a little night-lamp always burned.

Ardis noiselessly approached the door, and opening it slowly and gently, she looked in. Her father was asleep —soundly asleep—as his low and regular breathing testified. His ruddy, upturned features were distinctly visible. Ardis gently drew near and seated herself upon the corner of a chair which stood close by the bedside; then leaning forward she steadfastly looked upon her father's face. What she would do, what she would say, how she would attempt to explain her presence there should he suddenly awake, she did not consider. She simply sat, and looked upon his face.

For ten or fifteen minutes Ardis remained thus, leaning slightly forward and gazing upon her father's features, calm in sleep. Then she bent her face down close to his, and gently kissed him on the cheek. There was a slight twitching in the muscles of his face and she drew back quickly; but, almost immediately, the regular breathing began again, and he slept on.

Quietly rising, Ardis now moved toward the door. There she stopped, and, turning, looked back for a few moments at her father. Then she went out, leaving the door as she had found it. What she had done was a very

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little thing, but it was the sole reason for which in the middle of the night she had trudged through the snow to Bald Hill.

When she reached the lower hall she was struck with an idea. Going to the library she found the match box in its regular place on the mantel-piece, and igniting a match by touching it to an exposed ember, so that no crackling should be heard, she lighted a candle in one of the old-fashioned silver candlesticks which stood on each end of the mantel-piece. With this heavy piece of family plate in her hand she went over all the lower part of the house, omitting only the store-room, the door of which was locked. When she had satisfied herself that everything was in order, and that the comfort of her father and his guest, the general, was properly attended to she re-entered the library, blew out the light, and when the little spark on the wick had entirely died away, she replaced the candlestick on the mantel-piece.

Her feet were now cold, having so long been covered only by stockings, and she stood and warmed them at the fire. Outside the man behind the oak tree kept stamping his feet, but did not succeed in keeping them very warm. Through the half-closed slats of the shutters he had seen the light as Ardis passed from room to room, and had thought how easy it would be for a robber to rob the Bald Hill house. Fortunate therefore it was that there were no robbers. Thinking thus he stamped his feet, and did not wonder that Ardis was loth to leave that comfortable mansion.

When Ardis had warmed her feet, she went to the window, put on her boots, raised the sash, got out, closed the window and shutters, and then, with as little creaking of boots and boards as was possible, she made her way along the piazza and down the steps.

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"Now," she said to herself, as she reached the ground, "I do not see why any one should know that I have been here." The reason she did not see was the opacity of an oak tree.

When she had crossed the lawn and entered the apple orchard the man behind the tree began to follow her. She went straight away across the fields, but not in the track by which she had come; for making a slight divergence she believed she could avoid the gullies. She now began to feel a little nervous. When she had been going to Bald Hill, her object, and the fact that she was approaching her home, had sustained her courage. But now she was going to a strange place, and it was very, very late. If she should meet a man or a dog, or suddenly find herself benumbed by cold, what would become of her? Steadily behind her followed the man. He knew what would become of her should danger threaten.

When Ardis reached her bed-room window, the sill of which was some four feet from the ground, she found that she could not raise the lower sash. The projection of the frame work around the panes on the outside was so slight that her fingers could obtain but little hold, and she could not reach the upper part of the sash. She was about to relinquish the attempt in shivering despair when a low voice beside her said: "Allow me to raise the window, Miss Ardis."

If she had not known the voice she would have screamed in fright. "Dr. Lester!" she said. "Is it possible that I have awakened you by trying to get in at this window?"

The doctor smiled, and still depressing his voice for fear of awakening the Chiverley's, he said: "People cannot get into my houses without my knowing it. And now, let me help you in."

With one foot in his hand, as if she were mounting a

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horse, Ardis was raised to the window-sill, and entered her room. Before closing the window she leaned out, and said: "I think it is right, doctor, that I should tell you that I have been to Bald Hill. I could not pass so near my home without peeping in on father, and I did that and bade him good-by, although he did not know it, being fast asleep. I slipped away by myself because I was sure you would all cry out against such an undertaking. But I went there and came back without meeting even an old hare. My only mishap was not being able to open this window, and I am very sorry that I made you come out of your house to open it for me."

"That is a matter of no consequence," said the doctor. "But you must not stay any longer at that open window. Good-night."

Dr. Lester had just opened his door when he heard a step behind him, and, turning suddenly, he beheld Bonetti. As the doctor started back in amazement the other said in a high whisper: "I'll be mighty glad to get inside and warm myself, doctor, for I am pretty nigh froze." And saying this, he immediately entered the house.

The doctor followed. "Bonnet!" he exclaimed, "what does this mean? What are you doing here?"

Bonetti drew a chair close to the fireplace, in which some ends of logs were still smouldering. "Well," said he, "I have been to Bald Hill with you and Miss Ardis Claverden. When I saw you followin' her across the fields I reckoned that you were goin' along to take care of her without her knowin' it. So I followed you to take care of you."

"Of me?" said the doctor, so agitated that he had not thought of sitting down. "And how did you come to see Miss Ardis? What were you doing here?"

"Yes," said Bonetti, extending his feet dangerously

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close to the embers, "I went along to take care of you, for if you'd met one drunken feller keepin' Christmas before the time you'd ha' been just as likely to meet two, and then your hands would have been a little too full. And how did I know it was Miss Ardis? That was easy enough to anybody who had ever seen her walk. But I would have known it was her any way from havin' seen her and that painter gentleman and his wife all sittin' together in the kitchen of the old house."

"Bonnet!" exclaimd the doctor.

"Yes," said Bonetti, "I came up not long after supper, thinkin' I'd have a little talk with you, and when I opened your door you wasn't here; and when I saw a path through the snow from this house to the other one, and a regular dug-out path, too, such as you wouldn't have made for yourself, I began to wonder and I went over to see what it meant. The shutters were all shut, but there was a chink in one of them, and I looked through, and there was you four sittin' before the fire."

"Bonnet," said the doctor, "that was a low-down, contemptible thing for you to do."

"No, it was not, said Bonetti. "I wanted to see who was in there, and how could I tell that I oughtn't to look till I had looked? You may bet your life that I jumped when I did see who was there! I didn't look in no more, for I don't make a business of peepin' through chinks, but I went into that old garden where I could walk about without bein' seen, and I tramped up and down in a trodden path thinkin' and thinkin' and thinkin', and tryin' to work out the toughest puzzle that had ever been set before me since the day I was born. And put it this way or that just as much as I pleased there was only one way in which I could work it out. There was Miss Ardis Claverden almost within rifle shot of her own home where

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she was born and raised, and not goin' there, and shuttin' herself up in that old house; and there was that painter —I forget his name—and his wife; and there was you. Now it stands to reason there was only one way to work that out, and that was that you'd been playin' a mighty deep game on me, and on most other people too, and that you and Miss Ardis was goin' to run off and get married, and that them two had come with her to help along, and that none of you was goin' to show at Bald Hill till the knot was tied."

"What outrageous and abominable stuff!" cried Dr. Lester.

"Well," said Bonetti, "that was the only way I could work it out; and I made up my mind that when you came back to your house I'd come up to you, fair and square, and ask you about it, and if I hadn't worked it out right you could say so. But you was an awful long time comin' out, and after walkin' up and down and keepin' a watch upon the house until near the middle of the night, and then comin' up close to the back door, and hearin' you all still talkin' inside, I went to the stable and sat down alongside of the horse so as to get warmed up. His hide was mighty comfortable to put my hands on, and I stayed longer than I thought to, and when I come out the first thing I saw was a woman jumpin' on the snow from a lower window. You can bet that I stood stock still and kept shady when I saw that. Then she put off and got into the field, and of course I knew who it was; then out you come, quiet, and followed her. I let you get a little on, and I followed you, as I told you before. Now I couldn't work out what she was goin' off to Bald Hill for. At first I thought she had repented her bargain, and was runnin' home to her father. But I soon considered that she wasn't the kind of a girl to go back on anybody."

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The doctor here made an impatient gesture, and seemed about to interrupt, but he did not, and Bonetti continued.

"By the time she had got into the Bald Hill house—and mighty neat she did it too—I had made up my mind that she had gone home to get something she wanted to take with her. I reckoned she'd be out pretty soon because I saw you waitin', so I waited too. It was cold work, but I reckoned I could stand it as long as you could; and when she come out, havin' got her breastpin or her ring, or whatever it was she was after, I followed after you both and saw you help her in the window. Now then, doctor, if I haven't worked it out the right way, what is the right way?"

Dr. Lester, who had been standing all this time, now sat down before the fire. He was very angry with Bonetti, and would have been glad to refuse to gratify his anxiety. But the man had seen so much it would be wise to secure his secrecy by telling him everything. Therefore, in as few words as possible he stated the facts in the case. "And now Bonnet," said the doctor, "you are not to breathe to your family, or to any one, that you have seen Miss Ardis and her friends here; or that you know anything about their movements or their intentions. As for me it is of no importance whether I stay here or go away; and if people think I am absent on Roger Dunworth's behalf I have no objections. But they must know nothing of the company with me. And, by-the-way, Bonnet, since you have forced yourself into this matter, I shall get you to do something for me. If Roger Dunworth should come home while I am looking for him, or if you should hear anything about him which I ought to know, I want you to telegraph to me. I will give you the address."

So saying the doctor went to his desk and presently returned with the address on a card. Bonetti took it.

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"Didman's Hotel, Atlanta, Georgia," he read. "That I suppose, is the p'int you're goin' to operate from?"

"Yes," said the doctor, "and remember this, Bonnet. When Miss Ardis returns, successful or unsuccessful, she will tell her father all that has happened, but he must not hear a word of it from any other lips."

"All right!" said Bonetti. "Nobody shall hear of it from me." He was silent for a moment, and then he went on. "It does seem to me, Dr. Lester, that you must love a girl most powerful when you do all you're doin' to help her to get the man she wants."

"Bonnet!" exclaimed the doctor springing to his feet, "I once told you to drop all that!"

"Dropped it is," said the other, pushing back his chair and extending his fingers with a jerk as if something hot had fallen from them. "And now I think I'll go home. If I hear anything about Dunworth I'll telegraph to you, namin' no names. But I don't believe he'll be ketched for a horse thief. He's too sharp for that."

"You may as well sleep here," said the doctor, "It is very late, and you can have that lounge."

"No," said Bonetti. "I don't mind walkin' home, and if the women folks should get up to-morrow mornin', and find me away and no wood split, there might be a row. Good night, and good luck to you!"

The next day Cream-o'-Tartar, with some difficulty in muddy places, drew our party to Woodbridge Station where, in due time, a southern-bound train arrived and took them on their journey. The doctor did not mount the steps of the car until the train was on the point of starting. He had been stroking the nose of his horse, and talking to a man who was to take charge of him.

"I don't wonder, Dr. Lester," said Ardis, as they were moving off, "that you wanted to say good-by to Cream-

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o'-Tartar. He is a good horse; and when I come back I am going to do something for him. I don't know what it will be, but something for his comfort."

"Yes," said the doctor, "he is a good horse." And then he dropped the subject. It was not for him to say to Ardis that on the morning before he had sold Cream-o'-Tartar to pay the expenses of this journey.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

AT Didman's Hotel in Atlanta our party heard no news of Roger Dunworth. That this should be so had been considered among the strong possibilities; and no time was lost in making preparations to carry out the plan of campaign which had been agreed upon. After it had been made plain that Roger had not gone to any other place in the city, a letter was sent to the postmaster at Breeville, announcing the approach in that direction of friends of Mr. Dunworth; and the next morning the party set out on their search through a portion of the State untraversed by railroads. It was decided to proceed northward toward Breeville, as it was supposed that Roger would naturally make his way southward toward Atlanta, where he had requested Dr. Lester to address him. At all possible points inquiries were to be made and at places where it might be thought proper notes were to be left for Roger, or information for his benefit.

Two buggies were hired for the journey, each drawn by a single horse. It was considered better to proceed in this way, as in the search it would sometimes be necessary for the party to separate. The travellers took with them very little baggage, leaving their trunks at Atlanta, and the clothes they wore were such as were suited to rough work in all weathers. The doctor did not find it necessary to make any change in his dress, but Mr. Chiverley wore a gray flannel shirt and a soft, shapeless hat. His wife considered herself quite ready for roughing

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it in an old woollen dress and a black straw hat tied on with a veil. Ardis wore a suit in which she had been accustomed to tramp about Bald Hill in bad weather. Her dark flannel dress was short, a silk handkerchief was tied loosely around her neck, and her hair was tightly put up, and almost concealed under a boy's felt hat. On her feet she wore the boots which Dr. Lester had returned to her.

"Well!" cried Mr. Chiverley when he saw her. "You are the young lady who advised us to bring our best clothes down here so we could make an impression of respectability."

"Certainly," said Ardis, "and if the time comes to make such an impression we should feel badly if we had to make it in this toggery. But for working purposes I call this sort of thing quite suitable."

"You have made yourself look like a girl," said Mrs. Chiverley, "while I resemble an old woman. I think I shall take you for my daughter."

"Very good," said Ardis, "and when we get tired of that we can change the relationship with the costume."

The party set out, with the two gentlemen in the leading buggy and Ardis driving Mrs. Chiverley in the other.

Their plan was to change about when they felt like it.

As they drove along Mr. Chiverley said to his companion: "I don't care to speak in this way before the ladies, but since I have found that Mr. Dunworth has not made his appearance in Atlanta where his letters were to be forwarded, I have not been hopeful in regard to him. It is now a long time since he left Breeville."

"The case does not look as well as I should like it to," said the doctor, "but I don't despair. Roger Dunworth is a peculiar fellow, and his travelling, especially in the present instance, is likely to be different from the travelling of any other man. For years he has been much inter-

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ested in northern Georgia, and although this was not the reason of his leaving home, I am sure it determined the place of his exile. At college he was an ardent student, and now he is an ardent farmer. If there is any better way of doing things than as he does them he wants to know it. With this object in view it would be of no use or interest to him to travel on a high road direct to Atlanta. He would naturally diverge in one direction and another, and continue his observations as he made his way south. I imagine that he may have an idea of settling down here, and that he is investigating different localities with that view."

"His present farm is a very good, one," said Mr. Chiverley.

"Yes," said the doctor, "but he probably could make more money here, and in his present state of mind he might prefer to live here. I shall be very sorry if he leaves us, for our country cannot afford to lose such a man."

"I should say not," remarked the other. "We used to see a good deal of him the summer we were at Bolton and Bald Hill, and we both considered him a first-class fellow. He went away in a fit of jealousy, didn't he?"

"Jealousy or despair," said the doctor.

"Well," said Mr. Chiverley, "I don't approve of either jealousy or despair, but if a man is liable to these things I don't know any one more capable of bringing them on than Miss Ardis Claverden."

"True!" said the doctor.

After a silence of a few moments, Mr. Chiverley remarked: "No man could receive a higher compliment than to have Ardis Claverden come down here on his account. Of course it is the motive which makes the action valuable. As far as doing anything is concerned it would

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have been better to have sent two more men than to have come herself and bring Mrs. Chiverley.

"I am not sure of that," said the doctor. "Miss Ardis came down here to see that we did everything that could be done; and especially to see that we did not get discouraged and give up."

"You may be right," said Mr. Chiverley. "It is possible we might have weakened—at least I might—but with her with us I think there will be no weakening."

That day our friends heard nothing of Dunworth, but this did not greatly disappoint them, as they were yet too near Atlanta to expect much in the way of news of him. They spent the night at a village, and in the morning pursued their journey. On this day some *détours* were made, in one instance the doctor walking several miles across the country to a cross-roads post-office of which he had been told. He enjoyed this opportunity of stretching his long legs, but when he rejoined his party he had no news to give them.

Nothing of importance occurred the next day except that about the middle of the afternoon one of the horses, who had been a disappointment during the whole journey, showed signs that his day's supply of strength was giving out; and they therefore found themselves obliged to stop at a settlement some miles short of the place where they expected to spend the night.

Ardis was very impatient at this delay. They were now approaching a part of the country where news was to be expected; and the town at which they had intended to conclude their day's journey was a place of some importance, where they might reasonably expect to learn something. An effort was made to get another horse, but there were none to be had at this place. They hoped that in the morning the horse would be able to carry them on.

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The tavern at which they stopped was small but comfortable enough. The two ladies, with the books they had brought with them, ensconced themselves in the dining-room, where, although the weather was not cold a fire of brushwood was crackling on the hearth. The doctor and Mr. Chiverley went out for a tramp, partly for the sake of the exercise and partly because they might chance upon news of Dunworth at some farm-house or cross-roads store.

Ardis soon tired of reading, and leaving Mrs. Chiverley to the fire and her book, she went out on to a side piazza which opened from the parlor. Outside it was much more agreeable to her than in-doors. The sun had not yet set, and the air was just beginning to be touched with a gentle frostiness. She went in-doors, put on her hat and jacket, and walked up and down the piazza.

While thus quieting her impatience by circulating her blood three horsemen rode up to the tavern, and tying their horses to a rack they entered a bar-room which was in the front of the house on the ground floor. From the end of the piazza, Ardis, having nothing else to look at, watched these men as they dismounted and went into the house. They were ordinary-looking men, plainly dressed, and in appearance no wise interesting. In horses, even if ordinary, Ardis was much more interested than in ordinary men, and she, therefore, turned her attention to the animals at the rack. Two of these horses might have been good-enough beasts, but they had been ridden hard, apparently for a long distance, and looked worn and tired. The third horse, however, seemed fresh and in good condition and as Ardis looked at him she thought what a fine thing it would be if her party could get such a horse as that with which to continue their journey instead of the one which had caused them such delay. The animal might

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not be a driving horse, and in all probability his owner would not be willing to hire him; but nevertheless she would go down to look at him.

He was indeed a fine horse and very much opposed to being tied to a rack. His companions stood quietly, their heads down, but he moved about, stamping impatiently and tossing his head from side to side as if he were looking for some one to come and loose him.

While standing near the horse, but out of the way of his sidelong movements, Ardis was joined by the proprietor of the house, a pleasant little man who wore a straw hat in December.

"Fine horse that, miss!" said he. "Good enough for a general in the army! Man inside brought him down from Whitefield, and I must say he stood the journey better than them others. That's the way a horse with blood in him shows what he's worth."

"The others appear to be very good horses," said Ardis.

"Yes," said the man, "but they don't begin to come up to this fellow! He is a little damp on his legs and flanks, but on the rest of him he hasn't turned a hair. If I had the money I'd like to own that horse! You might almost think he was tryin' to say that he wants his supper, and was a-wonderin' if his master was a-goin' to take him back home or put him up here. I reck'n I'll go in and inquire about that p'int myself."

Ardis still stood, looking at the horse. Gradually she began to imagine that she had seen him before. She went to the other side of him and made him stand around. She now knew why he seemed familiar to her. He resembled the horse on which she had once taken a wild ride to drive back a runaway steer. That horse belonged to Roger Dunworth, and it was the one, as she had been told, on which he had taken his southern journey. There

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were certain movements of this animal's head as he turned to look at her which very forcibly recalled to her mind the horse which she had mounted at Heatherley to go after the steer.

The men now came out of the house and Ardis walked away to the other side of the road, where there was a broad foot-path. She strolled a short distance on this, and then, turning, she saw that the men had not mounted, but were walking over to a store at the other end of the little settlement.

Her mind was now occupied by a rush of conjectures. Could it be possible that this was Roger's horse? And if so, how did these men get him? She did not believe that Roger had sold him, for this she did not consider likely. But if any evil had happened to Roger the horse might have fallen into the hands of these men.

The men having now entered the store, Ardis crossed the road, and again approaching the horse, began to examine him more critically than before. He had upon him a handsome brass-pomelled army saddle, and lifting the flap of this, Ardis saw underneath, scratched boldly and clearly on the leather, the letters "R. D."

"This is Roger's horse!" Ardis said almost aloud, "and this is his saddle!" And her heart began to beat hard and fast. "These men have stolen him!" she said. "In any event, Roger would not have sold this saddle! It was his father's." Then again rushed into her mind the dreadful thought that something had happened to Roger. But she bravely struck down this thought. "No," she said. "If anything had happened no farther away than that horse has travelled to-day it would have been heard of here!" And then there came into her mind a thought which displaced everything else, and that was that Roger might not be very far away!

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Of course it was possible that the horse had made an easy journey to-day and that he had made an easy one the day before, and another the day before that, but no such possibilities entered the mind of Ardis, nor did she call upon her judgment to act. She *felt* that that horse had come from Roger and that he had not come far. The men might have brought the other horses from Whitefield County, but not this one.

She stood trembling, pressing her hand against the warm shoulder of the horse. It was Roger's horse; it was Roger's saddle. She looked about her; the men were still in the store, but at any moment they might come out; Dr. Lester and Mr. Chiverley were nowhere visible on field or road. For an instant she thought of the little landlord with the straw hat. But what could he do? What would he be willing to do?

Instinctively, and scarcely knowing that she did it, she shortened the stirrup on the near side of the horse at which she was standing. Then she stood, thinking hard and fast, like the striking of an alarm-clock. If she could get that horse away until the doctor and Mr. Chiverley came back they might be able to do something or to find out something. But if the men rode off before the return of her friends the horse would be gone, and with him the strongest clue to Roger's whereabouts. The idea that the men were horse-thieves was now firmly fixed in her mind.

Suddenly she stopped thinking, and without casting a glance around her, she quietly stepped forward to the rack, and standing on tip-toe loosed the bridle from the peg and threw it over the horse's neck. Then, with her hand on the pommel of the saddle, she gave a strong upward spring. She had done this sort of thing before, but this horse stood higher than her mare, and there was a

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little struggle before she got her seat. One foot went into the stirrup, and one knee against the pommel. It was an unsafe position, but she did not think of that.

The horse backed and sidled into the road. Ardis sat up proudly. "Now I have possession of him!" she thought. "They shall not have him again until everything is explained."

At this instant she heard a shout down the road, and looking back she saw the three men outside the store, one of them running toward her. With a word to the horse and with a grip of the pommel with one hand, she cantered away from the men. The peculiar danger of her situation did not oppress her. But if it had she would not have hesitated.

"They shall not go off without telling everything," she said, and again looked over the fields for her friends. She saw nothing of them, but her backward glance took in the tavern and she saw that two of the men were mounting their horses; that the little landlord was standing in the road, wildly gesticulating; and that Mrs. Chiverley was leaning over the rails of the piazza.

Ardis leaned forward and urged her horse into a gallop. When she gave up the animal it should be in the presence of Dr. Lester and Mr. Chiverley. Until they appeared the men should not have him!

She was going at a good pace, but she heard the hard beating of hoofs behind her. Turning her head, she saw that two men were riding after her, and gaining on her. As she turned they shouted to her to stop. There was something frightening in their voices and gestures; and even she had been thinking of stopping to parley with them, she dared not do so now. If the men were not thieves and rascals, why should they be so disturbed at a young woman taking a ride on one of their horses? Why

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should they doubt that she would come back to her friends?

Her first object now was to get away from her pursuers, and she did not in the least doubt she could do it. If she caught sight of the doctor and Mr. Chiverley she would instantly put herself and the whole affair into their hands; but if she did not see them she would ride to a farm or a village where she could seek protection, not only for herself, but for Roger's horse. At all risks that horse must be detained until the thread which stretched from him to Roger could be followed up! If those men should overtake her they might injure her or they might not, but they would certainly bear away the horse, and break and utterly destroy the present strong clue to the object of her journey.

She had no whip, but her quick, earnest words and the fire of haste which seemed to run from her nervous hand through the reins and bit into his brain were enough for the spirited animal beneath her. He gave full play to his powerful muscles, and went over the road at a pace which made Ardis hold hard to the pommel of the saddle in order to keep her seat.

A few minutes of this furious galloping brought her to a fork in the road. It mattered not to Ardis which road she took, but the horse gave her no opportunity of making a decision, for, with a swerve which nearly unbalanced her, he turned into the left-hand road. When she felt that she again had command of her seat—and for a few moments she had had some doubt of this—Ardis turned to look back. On the road over which she had gone she saw but one of her pursuers, and he was at such a distance behind her she felt sure he would not overtake her. But where was the other?

She turned to the other side, and saw him galloping madly along the main road, but past the point at which

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she had turned. He must have been not far behind her when she reached the fork, but why should he keep on the other road?

In a few moments she divined his purpose. The road she was on now made a curve to the right, around the base of a low hill, and in all probability it approached the highway, and the man who was so furiously keeping on the straight course might make a cut across the fields and get into the road ahead of her. Then she would be lost, for with one pursuer before her and another behind her she could do nothing.

For an instant she thought of turning into the fields to her left, and dashing across the country to the settlement from which she had come. But this would be impossible. In a man's saddle she could not leap fences nor go over a rough country. In less than a minute she had passed the hill, and throwing an excited glance over the level fields, she saw that her suspicions had been correct. The foremost man had already left the main road, and was madly urging his horse across a pasture field. She could see his arm waving up and down as he plied the whip. Her road as she saw it before her still curved toward the other, and to her judgment the man seemed nearer the point upon it at which he was aiming than she was.

Her situation was desperate, and she determined upon a bold stroke. She was more afraid of the man before her than of the one behind her, partly because it was clear that the latter was mounted on the poorer horse. She would turn, make a wild dash past him, and gallop back to the tavern, at which place the doctor and Mr. Chiverley must, by this time, have arrived. Her intention to carry out this plan was strengthened by the feeling that she did not wish to longer pursue this unfrequented country road which was taking her she knew not where. Had she

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kept on the main road she must have reached protection; but this seemed to lead into an unsettled country.

As quickly as this resolution was formed she essayed to carry it out; but her horse paid no attention to her attempts to turn him. Stiffening his powerful neck, he kept straight on. Her position in the saddle gave her little command over him, for it was as much as she could do to cling to her seat as he bounded beneath her. There was no help for it, she must go on; and go on to meet that man so swiftly crossing the field, making for a point where there was probably a gate or a break in the fence. But if she must go on, then must she go on like lightning, and pass that point before he reached it.

She shook the reins with frantic haste, and fairly shouted in the horse's ears. The animal was as greatly excited as his rider, and he seemed to know that he must not allow himself to be headed off. Thoroughly warmed by his previous running, he now gathered himself up and threw himself out with such quick and powerful action that Ardis felt as if she were sitting upon a steam-engine working at highest speed, every stroke of which thrilled and shook her. Dropping the reins, she clung with one hand to the horse's mane and with the other to the pommel.

The horse on which the man was riding across the field may have been tired and worn out when he reached the tavern, but he was surely an animal of good blood and bottom, for his frantic rider had worked him up into a surprising burst of speed. The two horses rushed madly toward the disputed point; the man shouting wildly as he rode, and Ardis leaning forward and clinging fast as if for dear life; but the freshness of her horse, if not his better blood, told well in this last mad rush; and he passed a break in the fence while the other animal was still fifty feet away from it.

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Ardis did not turn her head, but as she passed the man she leaned forward and shut her eyes, and as she did so she heard the crack of a pistol. The infuriated man, blinded by his rage, had fired, whether at the horse or at her he scarcely knew himself, but his aim was wild, and Ardis was already in such an excited condition that the report scarcely frightened her. As she sped quickly on she felt that her escape had truly been made. After his frenzied rush over the fields the horse of her pursuer must be good for little in a chase after Roger's noble beast. The pistol-shot could only have been an act of desperation, and it announced that the chase had been given up.

Very soon after he had so successfully swept by the disputed point, Ardis' horse somewhat slackened his gait. He still kept up a swift and even gallop, and Ardis felt that, should there be necessity for another burst of speed he had within him the power to make it, but she feared no such necessity. Looking back, she saw no one in the road. In all probability the man had not even left the field.

But where was she now going? She knew not, but she would not stop until she had placed miles between herself and those men. And for miles she rode on, looking right and left for a house at which she might stop. Here and there were cabins, and once or twice she passed a small house; but these were not the places she was looking for. She wanted to reach a farm, or some settlement where there were plenty of people about, but she gradually came to believe that she was not on the road to that sort of thing.

The sun had set and it was now growing dusky; and as she approached a moderate-sized house standing back from the road, Ardis almost involuntarily pulled on the bridle of her horse. But he paid no attention to the pull

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and galloped on. And now the animal began to toss his head and snort as horses do when they approach their homes and behold visions of hay-racks and measures of grain. Ardis knew what this meant. She leaned forward so that her head rested on the horse's neck. Her strengthening excitement had died out, but over her there stole a certain pleasurable feeling.

"He is going home," she said to herself; "at least to the place where he was last fed and cared for. It may be that he has been there a good while. And it may be that Roger is there!" She patted his neck. "Good horse!" she said. "That is the reason you turned into this road. And that is the reason you would stop nowhere but at your stable."

And so, worn out and shaken as she was, speeding along that wild road in the dusk of the evening, Ardis felt a quieting happiness stealing over her. She knew that the friends she had left behind her at the tavern must be in a sad commotion. They could not know where she had gone or what had become of her; but they must know that angry men were in pursuit of her, and that the gravest dangers might beset her. But there was no help for it. She was as sorry for them as it was possible for her to be, and would have done anything to let them know that she had escaped her pursuers and was on her way to a probable shelter and safety, and, possibly, to Roger. And so, while grieving for the grief and anxiety of her friends, she felt a sense of relief through body and mind, and wondered should she really find Roger, or merely news of him which would enable her to find him.

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CHAPTER XXIX.

IT was growing dark when the horse on which Ardis had taken her long and perilous ride suddenly accelerated his pace, and then abruptly turned from the road. Ardis raised her head and saw that he was galloping up a lane toward a house where a light was shining. The horse did not go to the house, but turned off into a barn-yard littered with straw and cornstalks; and there he stopped, threw up his head, and whinnied. The moment he came to a halt Ardis drew her foot from the stirrup and slipped to the ground.

When first upon her feet she trembled so much that she feared she could not stand, but as a man came out of the open door some of her strength returned to her, and she made a few steps toward him. But he did not give her a chance to speak.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "If here ain't Biscay! Well! Well! Upon my word I'm right down glad to see that horse!"

Then he turned to Ardis and looked upon her with a face of astonishment. The horse began to move toward the barn, but the man took hold of the bridle, still keeping his eyes fixed upon Ardis.

"Whar did he come from?" he exclaimed. "Did you fetch him? And whar did you git him? Upon my word, I never reckoned this horse would be brought back by a gal—and a little gal like you! How did you come to do it?"

That Ardis in her short dress, with her boy's hat pulled

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down over her eyes to keep it from flying off, should be looked upon in the dim light of evening as a "gal" was not surprising, but Ardis, tired as she was, could not restrain a little smile at the appellation. The man's words greatly cheered her. The fact that she was at a place where the horse was known was a most encouraging point.

"I can't answer your questions now," she said. "I am too tired. Is the owner of that horse here? That is, is Mr. Dunworth here?"

The man looked at her a moment without answering. "Oho!" he then said, as if surprised that she should know the name of the horse's owner. "No, he ain't here."

Ardis' heart fell.

"He ain't here jus' now," continued the man, "but I reckon he will be before long. He's gone off with my man Bill to look for this horse that was stole out of this barn airly this mornin'."

Now uprose the heart of Ardis in swelling triumphant joy. Roger was alive, well, and free! Not until this moment did she understand how there had been lying coiled up within her a dreadful fear that he might not be alive, well, and free. She was about to speak, but her voice forsook her, and she was obliged to make a second attempt.

"I should like," she faltered out, "to wait for him."

"Wait?" said the man. "Of course you can wait as long as you like. Jus' stop a minute till I tie this horse, an' I'll take you inside."

Having thrown the bridle over a hook in the barn, the man rejoined her. "I reckon if you've come any distance on that big horse an' no crutch to the saddle, you must be pretty well played out. Come on in. But I will say that I'm everlastin' cur'ous to know how a gal like you came to fetch that horse here!"

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"I can't tell you now," said Ardis. "I must wait until Mr. Dunworth comes back."

"All right!" said the man, as the opened the house door. "If them's your orders we'll have to wait. Here's a gal who's brought home the horse that was stole," he said to his wife, a pleasant little woman who was busy helping a colored girl get supper.

The wife was as much astonished as her husband had been, but when she looked upon that portion of Ardis' pale face which was not covered by her hat, and noticed the weary way in which she dropped upon a chair, her amazement gave way to kindly solicitude.

"By your looks," she said, "you must be tired almost to death. Supper'll be ready directly, an' when you've had a good meal you'll feel stronger an' ready to tell us the meanin' of all this business."

"No," said her husband, "she's not to tell anybody till the owner of the horse comes. That's pretty hard on us, but I reckon we'll have to stick it out."

Ardis now spoke and said she wanted nothing but a cup of coffee and a piece of bread, and then she would be very thankful if she might be allowed to lie down somewhere.

"The coffee is purtty nigh b'iled," said the woman, "an' you can have a cup in a minute."

"An' I'll step out," said the man, "an' give Biscay his feed. But I'll jus' say one thing before I go." And he now spoke without looking at Ardis. "I want it generally understood that no man who tries to steal that horse or any other horse on this place is goin' to git away alive. Now that I know there's horse-thieves about I'm ready for 'em."

As the man closed the door his wife turned from the fire and looked at Ardis. "Do you mean to say," she

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asked, "that anybody has put you under oath to say nothin' 'cept to the owner of the horse?"

Ardis shook her head. "I am under no oath," she said, "but I cannot talk now."

It was Roger who should hear her story. Only to Roger could she tell it.

When Ardis had finished her slight repast—and the strong coffee toned her up wonderfully—the woman said to her: "If I was you I wouldn't lay down nowhere in my clothes, but I'd jus' go to bed an' have a good night's sleep. There's a little room at the top of the stairs that I can git ready for you in three minutes. Mr. Dunworth set off hot an' heavy after his horse before breakfas' this mornin', an' it's more'n as like as not that he won't be back till to-morrow. He's got to come back then, for he knows we can't do without the horses no longer'n that, an' the ones he an' Bill is ridin' is all we've got. Jimminy! he'll be glad when he sees that horse, for I believe he thinks more of him than he would of a wife an' baby!"

After a moment's thought Ardis agreed to the woman's proposal. If Roger came back in the middle of the night it would be no time to talk to him, and as he could not possibly know who had brought back his horse, her secret would be safe until she should tell it in the morning. As she went up-stairs she asked which way Mr. Dunworth had gone.

"Straight up the road," said the woman, pointing in the opposite direction from that in which Ardis had come. "That's the way the tracks p'inted."

"It is good," thought Ardis before she went to sleep, "it is very good that he went that way. He will come back disappointed, but that doesn't matter now, and if he had gone the other way he might have come upon those three men. Now he is safe."

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And notwithstanding that she was alone in a little house in a wild country, among utter strangers, and that Dr. Lester and Mr. and Mrs. Chiverley must be almost distracted by her flight and continued absence, she stretched herself out on the hard and lumpy bed of "corn shucks," and nestled her head as well as she could into the unyielding hen's feathers pillow, and almost laughed in irrepressible joy. She had come to the very house where Roger was staying! How he happened to be at this house mattered nothing to her. He was coming back to it; that was enough. With this thought banishing all others she passed into happy dreams.

Meantime the man and his wife were talking together down-stairs. "It's took away my appetite," said the man, "took it clean away, a-thinkin' an' thinkin' how on airth that horse come to be fetched back by a gal."

"That's what's been goin' through my head," said the woman, "like a shuttle, back'ards an' for'ards, ever sence I set eyes on her."

"The only notion I can lay hold of," said her husband, "is that the rascal who took the horse was afraid to keep him, for anybody who'd once seen him would know him again, an' has sent him back with some sort of a cock-an'-bull story to get money out of Mr. Dunworth; an' they sent a gal, because nobody would be likely to hurt a gal; an' if they'd sent a man he might have been nabbed or shot, one."

"I don't reckon," said the woman, "from the look of her, that she's mixed up with no horse-thieves; at least from her own free will an' likin'; anyway, if she is mixed up with 'em I should say she's the daughter of one of 'em; an' she's not to be blamed for that, for her own free-will an' likin' had nothin' to do with it. Of course she's after money, an' wants to bargain with the owner

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an' nobody else. But I've an idee that she found out whar that horse belonged, an' brought him back of her own accord."

"If that's what she's done," said the man, "I pity her when she gits back to them fellers."

"I reckon she's got that all straightened out," said the woman. "She's no fool. I could tell that by the way she wouldn't talk."

"It's more'n likely that's so," said the man. "An' then again she mayn't ha' took the horse from her folks. P'r'aps they sold him, an' she stole him from the man that bought him. Some o' them gals is powerful sharp, 'specially when they've been brought up to it!"

"Well," said the woman, "we may know the rights of it, and then again we may never know; for Mr. Dunworth likes mighty well to keep things to himself, an' he mayn't care to tell us what sort o' bargain he makes with the gal."

"Oh, go 'long!" said the man. "He'll tell me all about it, you bet, though he mayn't care to trust his concearns with a woman."

The wife arose and set about finishing up the work for the day, a gentle smile of superior knowledge flitting across her thin face.

The commotion in the tavern when Ardis rode away on Roger's horse was very great. Mrs. Chiverley had heard the sounds of galloping, and almost immediately the shouts of the men, and had hurried out to the piazza, where she plainly saw her young friend dashing away upon her flying steed. This sight almost stupefied her with amazement; and when she saw the two men mount and ride madly after Ardis, she became dreadfully frightened and began to scream for her husband and Dr. Lester. These gentlemen, however, had not returned, and the

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poor lady rushed wildly here and there, calling for some one to go after the young lady and bring her back.

The landlord of the tavern could give her no help, and indeed he scarcely paid any attention to her. It was all he could do to keep the stranger who had been left without a horse from laying violent hands upon him. In fact, had it not been for the presence of two or three negroes employed about the place, it is probable that the frantic assertions of the little man that he had nothing to do with the young woman's action, and that he had not the least idea in the world what it meant, would not have availed to save him from his angry accuser.

When Dr. Lester and Mr. Chiverley returned, the latter found his wife in an utterly prostrated condition on a chair on the piazza; and great as was his concern at the astonishing thing that was told him, he did not stop to ask questions, but hurried to her assistance.

With pale face and trembling hands Dr. Lester listened to the landlord's excited statements. He could not divine the meaning of what had happened, but he instantly decided what must be done. Ardis must be followed without a moment's delay. It was useless to speak to Mr. Chiverley. He had seen him carrying his wife into the house, and knew he could not leave her. He hurried to the stable, but was there dismayed by the information that the man who had been left horseless had quietly gone off on the better horse of the two which had been hired in Atlanta. The other animal was in an utterly worthless condition, and there were no other horses in the stable.

When he discovered the situation, the doctor, his face still pale but his hands no longer trembling, asked which way the lady had gone, and immediately set out on foot, his long strides carrying him nearly as rapidly as the moderate trot of a horse. The occupants of a cabin near

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the fork of the road told him that the lady and one man had gone up the road to the left; and this road the doctor followed, sometimes breaking into a little run, and then falling back into his long, steady stride. His mind did not dwell upon the fact that only one man had followed Ardis, nor at the time did he try to comprehend why any man should follow her, or why she should take this road or that one, or why she should have gone away at all. He only considered that this was the road she had taken, and that if it were possible to get along faster he must do it.

For a long time the doctor walked, and as he walked there gradually came into his mind a dim notion of Ardis' motive in this most extraordinary proceeding. He knew she would never hesitate to do the thing she thought she ought to do because danger might accompany the doing of it; but he also knew that she was not one who would incur danger such as she must have incurred that evening unless there was a very good reason for it. Of course the whole affair must, in some way, be connected with Roger Dunworth. Nothing else in this part of the world could be of sufficient importance to make her do as she had done without a word to any one. It was possible that she might have heard that Roger was in sore trouble—perhaps about to be hung—and she had taken the first horse she could meet with to fly to his rescue. Had he or Mr. Chiverley been there she might have spoken to them. Oh, why, oh, why, was he not there!

As he hurried along the doctor looked eagerly ahead of him, but no sign could he see of a female figure coming toward him. His hope was to come up with Ardis where she might stop, or to meet her returning. His fear was that some disaster to her would permit him to overtake her. He met no one, and there were but few houses on the road. At each of these, however, he made inquiries.

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A colored woman told him she had seen a horse running away with somebody on his back.

"Was any one following?" eagerly asked the doctor.

"No, sah," said the woman, "an' it wouldn't 'a' been no good if they had. Dey couldn't ketch dat hoss! Lawsee! how he was gwine! I done reckon de boy on he back done frighten him wid a bahskit. Dey's some hosses can't stand no bahskits on dey backs."

"Was there a boy on the horse?" asked the doctor in surprise.

"Can't say fer sartin, sah, de hoss go so fas'. It might 'a' been a boy; an' den again it mought 'a' been a gal; an' mought 'a' been a meal bag dat frightened de hoss, an' not a bahskit."

The doctor staid for no more surmises, and walked on. If the figure on the flying horse were really Ardis, what had become of the man who had pursued her up the road? The doctor had passed no roads nor lanes diverging from the one he was on; and when, a mile or two back, he had passed the break in the fence through which the man on the slower horse had joined his companion in the fields, it had offered him no hints in regard to the situation.

When he had mounted a long hill he came upon a barn, from an upper floor of which a colored man was throwing dry fodder to some cows in a yard. The house to which the barn belonged was not visible, but probably lay behind a mass of evergreens a quarter of a mile back from the road. When the doctor stopped at the barn the man stopped in his work. He was an intelligent negro, and proved himself able to give some coherent information. He had seen a girl riding like wildfire on a big bay horse; there was nobody following her; he had been about the barn ever since she had passed, and knew that she had not been followed. He supposed that she was going for

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the doctor. He reckoned she was going after old Dr. Jessup, who lived at Hammersville. There was a doctor a good deal nearer, but he reckoned he'd gone away somewhere.

"Where is Hammersville?" asked Dr. Lester.

"You jus' foller this road," said the negro, "till you git to the mountain, an' den you crosses ober de mountain, an' when you git to de bottom lands you come to a big branch wid a bridge ober it, an' den you keep straight along—can't make no mistake, sah, 'cause de road don't fork—an' den yo' come to a lot o' hills, an' when you done gone ober dem you kin see Hammersville if it ain't too dark."

"And how far is Hammersville?" asked the doctor.

"It's about twenty miles from here, sah. Dat's wot dey calls it, sah."

The doctor stood silent a moment, and then, with a few words of thanks, passed on.

The negro looked after him. "Bless my soul!" he ejaculated. "To put off like dat jus' when I was gwine ter ask him who dat gal was, an' who was sick, an' what he was gwine after her fer?"

The doctor walked on for some twenty minutes, and then he stopped. "Where is the good of it?" he asked himself. He had already walked at a great pace some seven or eight miles, and this, too, after a long tramp with Mr. Chiverley. He was a good pedestrian, but he could feel that his strength was giving out. That Ardis had gone to Hammersville he did not doubt. It was from such a little town that she would be likely to hear news of Roger, and only in such a place, where there were people to be called upon, could she render him any assistance. In a case like this she would not hesitate at a ride of twenty-eight or thirty miles; but as for himself, it

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would be impossible for him to walk to Hammersville that night. He hoped, he tried hard to believe, that she would reach her destination in safety; and in a town she would certainly find persons to take care of her. The fact that the men had ceased to follow her was a great relief to him. He sat down upon a stone to rest. It was growing dark and he could see no house nor light ahead of him. He determined he would go back to the barn where he had spoken to the negro and ask the man to take him to the house occupied by the owner of the farm. There he might obtain refreshment, and hire a horse and vehicle to carry him to Hammersville. But when he reached the barn he found it deserted; the man had gone away.

The doctor went through a gate into a roughly worn road which he supposed would lead him to the house, but he had not walked more than a dozen steps before he suddenly stopped. At a distance, and apparently from the mass of evergreens which now stood black against the sky, he heard the baying of a dog. Dr. Lester was a brave man, and had done things at which many brave men would hesitate; but the exception to his bravery was his fear of dogs. Reason as he might, and for a few moments he did reason with great earnestness, he could not prevail upon himself to go up alone through the shades of evening, to that house around which several fierce hounds might be prowling. He was even afraid to stay where he was for fear they should come upon him; and he made his way back to the barn as a place of security.

The barn doors were shut and fastened, but the doctor saw an open window not far from the ground, through which he clambered. He found himself in a stable, and by the faint light which came through the window he could see that it was a large one, and that there were no

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animals in it. He looked about him a few moments to find a place where he might sit down; and then he closed the window-shutter to prevent the dogs from following him. He now felt his way to a stall in which he had noticed a pile of hay or straw; on this he sat down to think, but he had not thought for five minutes before his head fell forward, and he began to doze.

In about an hour he awoke feeling very cold. He was surrounded by pitchy darkness and his only thought was to get himself warm. He remembered, while feeling his way to the stall, his hand had touched a horse blanket, or some heavy cloth hanging on a nail. He groped about for this, and at length found it. Wrapping himself up in it he lay down upon the straw.

"What can I do?" he said to himself. "I can do nothing but wait until morning." And, while considering what this necessity might entail, he fell into a heavy sleep, broken by anxious dreams and sudden shiverings. But despite the troubled restlessness of his brain, and despite the cold night wind which came in through the many cracks and crevices of the barn, the doctor slept on. He was very tired.

At the tavern on the main road, which had been closed up very early that night, the little proprietor was sitting behind his bar, cleaning and loading a large revolver, and bemoaning his unparalleled bad luck to two of his men whom he had called upon to spend the night in the house and help him to defend himself and his property if the need should arise. Such a thing had never happened to him before, nor had it ever happened to anybody so far as he knew. Indeed he believed it to be an unheard of calamity. To have a horse stolen from before his door in broad daylight, was a blow to his reputation and his business which might utterly destroy both. And stolen

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by a girl! Was such a thing ever known in this wide world? What sort of people these were who had come to him as respectable guests he did not know, and what might happen next he could not imagine!

Up-stairs Mr. Chiverley was sitting by his wife's bedside. When night came on, and Ardis returned not, she had become hysterical, and poor Harry Chiverley had his hands full. Chilled to the heart by his fears for Ardis, fears which were aggravated by his utter inability to understand the situation, he could do nothing but stay here and help his wife support the blow. It was impossible to leave her. Under the influence of an anodyne Mrs. Chiverley at last slept; but her husband did not undress, nor close his eyes that night.

In the little room at the head of the stairs in that lonely house, to which, in swift ungovernable flight, she had been brought by Roger's horse, Ardis lay in happy dreams. Her mind was capable of keenly appreciating the distress of the friends on whom had fallen the sudden shock of her unexplained and alarming escapade; but no thought of all this ventured in among the rosy fancies which filled her sleeping mind. Before her passed the bright and joyous scenes of an endless drama the title of which was: "Roger is coming!"

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CHAPTER XXX.

IT was very early the next morning when Ardis was awakened by some one standing by her bed. It was the woman of the house.

"You'd better git up," she said. "He's come!"

'Who?" exclaimed Ardis sitting up suddenly.

"The owner of the horse—Mr. Dunworth," said the woman. "He come back some time in the middle of the night, I don't know when; an' it's a good thing our man Bill give a shout when they got here, for Elick—that's my husband—might ha' shot 'em, for he had his gun all ready, an' his head was full of horse thieves. Mr. Dunworth was mightily tickled when he found his horse had been brought back, an' he's on pins and needles to see you. He's been up half an hour."

Ardis's face was as rosy as her dreams of the past night.

"Your sleep had freshened you up pow'ful," said the woman. "You'd better come down quick."

Ardis did not answer. Her heart was beating fast, and her dark eyes, filled with sparkling light, were fixed upon the wall opposite to her. "O Mrs. ——!" she suddenly exclaimed. And then she stopped. "Do you know I never thought to ask your name?" "It's Kisley," said the woman.

"O Mrs. Kisley," said Ardis in an entreating voice, "can't you lend me a dress or a skirt? Almost anything will do that is clean and long enough. I can't go down to him in the clothes I wore yesterday. The skirt is dread-

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fully torn and covered with mud splashes. After my last night's ride I wasn't fit to be seen!"

"Oh, bless me!" said Mrs. Kisley, "you needn't bother your head about nothin' of that sort. He's none of your stuck-up gentlemen. He's a plain, common-sense young man, an', if he makes a bargain with you for fetchin' back his horse he won't take no 'count of what sort o' duds you've got on."

"I cannot go down to meet that gentleman," said Ardis, "in the clothes I wore last night. Dear Mrs. Kisley, you must lend me something that will make me look at least decent."

"Well," said the other, "if you've set your mind on it, I s'pose there's no turnin' you. You look like a gal that's in the habit of havin' her own way. An' a good-lookin' one too!" she thought to herself, though prudently refraining from expressing this opinion aloud. "There's some of my sister's clothes in that closet. She's sixteen, an' p'raps they'll fit you. We haven't got no chillun, an' she lives with us. But she's gone away now to stay with mother, an' that's the reason you kin have this room, which is hern. If you kin find anything you really want you kin borry it, but don't spend no time fixin' up. 'Tain't fair to keep Mr. Dunworth waitin' a minute longer than kin be helped."

The moment Mrs. Kisley left the room Ardis sprang to the floor and began an eager investigation of the closet.

She found a pink calico dress of rather voluminous drapery, but neat and clean; and on the floor was a pair of slippers but little worn and apparently outgrown by the wearer of the gown. In a bureau drawer she discovered some collars and cuffs, and other little articles belonging to the holiday costume of the absent sister. With these treasures she proceeded to make a rapid toilet; and this

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was barely finished when Mrs. Kisley again entered. She was not accustomed to knocking, and simply opened the door and walked in. When her eyes fell upon Ardis she gave a gasp, and sat down heavily upon a chair near the door.

Well might she sit in dumb amazement. The rough, unkempt, and road-stained girl of the night before had changed into the most beautiful woman on whom her eyes had ever rested. The pink calico gown, somewhat too large for her, had been draped and fastened about her without any regard to the intents of its maker. A broad belt formed of a gray silk scarf held it around her waist, and a lace-trimmed handkerchief was pinned into a bow at her throat, while the neat slippers showed beneath the simple folds into which the skirt had been quickly drawn.

But the glory of this apparition was the hair. Here was the crowning, transforming touch. Under the unshapen felt hat the "gal" of the night before had had a tightly packed mass of hair which was no more likely to attract attention than the ordinary hair of a boy. Now the dark mass combed out and coiled at the top of the head, with airy little curls playing over the forehead, not only was a beauty in itself, but it gave to the face that full measure of loveliness which made it the face of Ardis Claverden.

Ardis smiled as she looked upon the dazed countenance of Mrs. Kisley. "You think I am a good deal changed, don't you?" she said.

"Changed!" ejaculated the woman, "I should say so! At first I thought you'd been doing something to yourself, but now I reckon you've only been undoin'. You must look like that always, don't you?"

"Yes," said Ardis, "as I am a woman I like to look one, except on special occasions when I don't object to being considered a girl."

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"But you don't belong to no—to no horse people?" said Mrs. Kisley.

Ardis did not understand what this meant, but she felt that it was necessary that she should, in a measure at least, explain the situation to Mrs. Kisley. "I will tell you after a while," she said, "how I happened to come here on Mr. Dunworth's horse. But I must go down to him now and I can only say to you that he is a very dear friend of mine, and I wish to see him by himself."

"Are you goin' to marry him?" asked Mrs. Kisley.

This blunt question brought a quick flush to the face of Ardis, but it also brought a flash of light into her eyes, and a half-smile to her lips.

"You needn't say nuthin'," said Mrs. Kisley. "I know!"

Ardis hurried down-stairs. As she opened the door which led into the living-room below stairs, Roger Dunworth stood with his back toward her and his hand upon the latch of an outer door. He had grown tired of waiting for the person who had brought his horse, and was going out to the barn. At the sound of the opening door he turned; and then with a sudden start, he stepped back, his shoulders striking the wall; his face flushed, and his mouth opened as if he would explain, but no sound passed his lips.

Ardis closed the door behind her. "How do you do, Roger?" she said, advancing with outstretched hand. "You look more astonished than Mrs. Kisley!"

Roger made a step forward. "You!" he gasped "Ardis? Here?"

"Yes," said she, "it is I; Ardis; here. Don't you intend to shake hands with me? And now sit down, and I will tell you the whole thing as fast as ever I can."

Roger mechanically sat down upon a chair which Ardis

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pushed toward him while she took another near by and began rapidly to sketch out the story of her coming. At first Roger scarcely comprehended a word that she said. His brain was filled with whirling thought which seemed impossible to catch or recognize that this was the woman who had cast him off; that this was Ardis Claverden; that she was here in this wild spot alone; that she had brought his horse! His reason could not cope with any of these ideas. They raged upon him like beasts that had broken from their cages.

But in a very short time the clear, straightforward story told by Ardis began to impress itself upon him, and it was not long before he knew how it was that she had come here. But there was something more difficult to comprehend than this.

"I don't understand," he said interrupting her before she had finished, "why should you come? And for me? What of *him?* Does *he* know?"

Ardis rose to her feet. "Roger Dunworth," said she, "you are thinking of Mr. Surrey! We will not talk of him now, but I will simply say that everything you have thought of, or done in regard to him is utterly without reason or foundation. I expected Dr. Lester to tell you this and explain the whole matter to you; now I may do it myself, but that can wait. It is enough for you to know that it is all a mistake."

For an instant the mind of Roger Dunworth turned back to those things about which he was asked to consider himself mistaken, but it could not stay there. Looking at Ardis Claverden as she now stood before him, he could not think of her anywhere else, nor with any one else. That she was here was everything just now.

He rose and stood before her. A sudden fire ran through every nerve. "Ardis," he said, "you would not

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have done all this; you would not have come down here —for my sake—if you had not loved me!"

The eyes of Ardis fell. How suddenly people came to this point! Even Mrs. Kisley jumped at it. But this was no time for delays and preparations. Things came quickly and must be met quickly. She raised her eyes to his. They were very beautiful eyes, with a sparkle in them.

"Of course not," she said.

Mrs. Kisley, who was looking through the keyhole of the inner door, now began to shed some gentle tears. These were caused by recollections. Not that anything had ever happened to her like that which was happening on the other side of the door, for Elick Kisley was not that sort of man; but her youth had not so long passed but that she could easily remember it, and her recollections were of things which she used to dream about, and which she hoped would some day happen to her, but which never did.

She soon ceased to look. One cannot see very well through a keyhole when one's eyes are filled with tears. She stepped softly to the stairs and sitting upon the lower step, she wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. Then she arose. "I must go and find Elick," she said to herself, "an' keep him from comin' in to the house. He mustn't come in just yet."

She went noiselessly out of a side door, and found her husband in the barn. There she told him everything that had happened from the transformation scene to the enrapturing finale. "You must wait awhile," she said, "an' then you must make a noise outside before you go in. An' you mustn't go in without your coat on, Elick. Bless my soul! Never in all your life was you in the same house with such a woman as she is!"

Elick Kisley was very much impressed by what he had

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heard. He did not exactly comprehend what had taken place, but he knew there was a lady in his house before whom he must not appear in his shirt sleeves. Persons in whose presence he was obliged to wear a coat always had a very depressing effect upon him.

"I must go an' see about the breakfas'," said Mrs. Kisley, "I reckon they must be about through now."

And Mrs. Kisley hurried to the kitchen, her mind troubled as she went for fear that the colored girl she had left there had been peeping in upon the lovers.

A little later Mrs. Kisley, after some preliminary fumbling at the latch of the door between the kitchen and the living-room, as if it were an unfamiliar latch and she did not know exactly how it worked, opened said door, and remarked: "We are goin' to bring in breakfas' now, an' I reckon you all's about ready for it."

Ardis and Roger were sitting side by side, a little apart. Her hands were in her lap, but the arm of Roger nearest Ardis hung by his side as if it had been suddenly dropped.

"Breakfast!" said Ardis starting to her feet. "You may be sure I am ready for it, for I have not had any regular meal since yesterday in the middle of the day. And, Roger, just as soon as possible after breakfast we must get back in some way or other to the tavern where Dr. Lester and the Chiverleys are. I really do not dare to think of the state of anxiety they must be in! But I am sure their delight in seeing you safe and sound will make amends for all their worry."

When Mr. Kisley came in to breakfast he gave one glance at Ardis, and then with downcast eyes went up to her and shook hands as if she had just arrived. His well-worn coat was buttoned up to his chin, and his long, black hair, thoroughly wet and combed and plastered down, hung in stiff perpendicularity around his head. He said

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but little as he sat at the table, but now and again he heaved a heavy sigh. Not that there was anything the matter with him, but that he must show in some way that he felt at home, and this was the most off-hand action that came into his mind at the time.

In the course of the somewhat hurried meal Roger made an arrangement with his host for a light wagon in which he and Miss Claverden could go to the tavern where their friends were staying. His own horse would draw them and the negro man could be sent later with another horse to bring back the wagon.

When Ardis had pushed back her chair from the breakfast table, she took Mrs. Kisley aside. "I must go upstairs and put on my own clothes," she said, "and perhaps you will help me get them into decent order."

Mrs. Kisley assured her that she might wear Malvina's garments as long as she liked, but Ardis declined this offer. A stitch or two and some brushing would make her own clothes do very well.

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Kisley, vigorously brushing a dirty skirt. "Those duds are good enough for trav'lin', but I don't wonder you wanted somethin' better to pop in on a sweetheart with. And how *did* you know he was here? An' *where* did you git the horse?"

As the brushing, the stitching, and the change of attire went rapidly on, Ardis gave Mrs. Kisley an outline of what had occurred, and no invented story could have so completely amazed that good woman.

When Roger came into the house to say that the vehicle was ready, he found Ardis sitting in the living-room. "Oho!" he cried. "Here is another young lady! And where in the world have you come from?"

"I came from Bald Hill," said Ardis, demurely casting down her eyes, "and these are the clothes I used to wear

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when I went tramping around the country with a young man in our neighborhood looking for things to sketch."

How well Roger remembered her in that dress! How well he remembered those days of tramping and sketching! "And this little girl," said he, "is she of the same way of thinking as the young lady I met this morning?"

"Yes," said Ardis, "they think very much alike, and although you cannot have the pleasure of helping the other one into your wagon, this one will pop in without any help at all if you are not very quick, sir."

As they were taking leave Mrs. Kisley drew Ardis aside. "It's no use tryin'; you can't do it; clothes won't do it; nothin' won't do it; you can't never make yourse'f the gal you was las' night."

"Why?" asked Ardis gently.

"On account o' *him*," said Mrs. Kisley, nodding in the direction of Roger.

Ardis made no answer, but drew close to Mrs. Kisley and kissed her. Tears came into Mrs. Kisley's eyes, and when the two had driven away she went and sat down on the bottom step near the keyhole through which she had seen what she used to dream about. To her this would henceforth be the one spot beloved in all the house.

Her thoughts were suddenly summoned from their wanderings by the voice of her husband, and she rose quickly and went into the living-room. Mr. Kisley still wore his coat, his hair remained plastered down, and his air of depression had not entirely left him.

"Look here," said he, "whar did she git them clothes? She didn't bring no baggage."

"They was Malvina's clothes," said Mrs. Kisley.

"Malvina's clothes!" exclaimed her husband. "An' if she had 'em, why on airth did she never wear 'em?"

Mrs. Kisley knew that the clothes had been often worn, but they had been worn by Malvina.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

IT was still early in the morning when Roger Dunworth and Ardis left the abode of the Kisleys. Biscay, who was not used to doing work between shafts and objected to even a light wagon, showed a decided disinclination to accommodate himself to circumstances; but when he became convinced that the reins were in the hands of a man who was determined to have his own way in the matter, he set off at a bounding trot, thinking probably that the faster he went the sooner he would get through with this disagreeable business. The horse could not go too fast for those who rode behind him. These two had done very much in the brief part of the morning which had passed, and now they wished to go with all haste to make their friends as happy as themselves.

On the way Roger told his story. It seemed a very simple and unimportant one to him compared to that which Ardis had told. On his reasons for going from home he touched but lightly. To his mind it had appeared that every one must know as well as he knew it that it was an absolute impossibility for him to stay there and see Ardis happy with another.

During the latter part of his exile he had begun—or thought he had begun—to inure his soul to what it had to expect for the rest of his life; and his wanderings had had for an object what Dr. Lester had surmised. If he could have found a place in this part of the country which pleased him, he would have been glad to buy it, lease his old home, and make an abiding place in which he believed

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it would be wiser for him to live than in the house where it had been the aim of his manhood to live with Ardis.

It was so plain from what he said, and from the straightforward earnest way in which he said it, that to live with Ardis was the only life which he thought worth living that the soul of the girl beside him glowed with gladness because she had been steadfast in her purpose and because he now knew that he was to spend his life with her. Much had happened—it seemed as if years had passed—since he had told his love and received no answer. But she had had faith that when she came to him with her answer she would find him steadfast. And she had found him so.

Regarding the mistakes he had made Roger said nothing at all. Ardis had assured him that they were mistakes, and that was the end of it. Even to think of them made his soul shiver; to speak of them was unnecessary torture. A man as happy as he was could afford to bury such dead things in a very deep grave, and to leave the spot without stone or mark.

He had been at Kisley's for a week, and had expected in a day or two to start thence on his way toward Atlanta. But the theft of his horse had changed all his plans, and it had been his intention to go this morning in search of Biscay in a direction which would have taken him far away from the friends who were looking for him.

As to the pursuit of himself as a horse thief he had never known of it until Ardis told him that morning. What might have happened to him in this almost wild region made his heart shudder; what had happened made it bound with joy and pride. He turned to Ardis, and took her hand. They were on an open road, and he could only take her hand.

And so Biscay trotted vigorously and rapidly onward,

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often breaking into a run, from which, however, he was quickly brought up by Roger; and although the road was not altogether a smooth one, little cared the two young people, sitting side by side on the single seat of the light wagon, for jolts and bumps. They had come from roads which were rough and hard to one which in the minds of these happy lovers lay before them as smooth as the surface of a placid lake and the occasional ruts and stones of the actual way beneath them were as nothing.

The rattling noise of a rapidly passing vehicle awoke Dr. Lester, who sat up suddenly on his pile of straw and shivered as he looked vacantly about him. For a few moments the only thing of which his mind was positive was that he was very cold; but just as it began to dawn upon him why he was there the negro man whom he had seen the night before looked in at the stable door.

"It's right smart late, sah, to wake you up, sah, but you did sleep so soun' dat I couldn't bear to 'sturb you."

"I was very tired," said the doctor, throwing off his blanket, and rising to his feet.

"If you'd come up to de house, sah," said the negro, "dey'd gibe you a good bed, but I 'spect you was afraid ob de dogs."

The doctor nodded, and the man continued.

"Dem dogs does keep off tramps, an' watermelon thieves, an' 'spectable pussons, all in a lump. I'd ha' took you up myself if I'd ha' known you was gwine ter stop. But wot I come in to wake you up an' tell you, sah, is dat de young 'ooman who rode by las' night, an' wot you was lookin' for, has jus' gone back ag'in in a wagon wid a strange doctor—at least I neber seed him afore. So I reckon, sah, dat if de sick pusson didn't die in de night he'll be all right now, an' you kin make your min' easy about him."

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After some earnest and rapid inquiries the doctor became convinced that Ardis was really on her way back to the inn, although in whose company he could not imagine. He did not deem it necessary to explain to the negro that she had not gone after a doctor and declining the man's invitation to go to the house and get some breakfast, he prepared to follow the wagon.

"It's a mighty bad shame, sah," said the negro, "dat dey didn't know you was in heah, fur dey might ha' stopped an' took you into de waggin. Whar is you gwine, sah?"

The doctor mentioned the tavern where he had stopped the day before, and then the man told him of a road through the woods which would save him at least two miles of walking. And, with a gratuity to the good-intentioned negro, he set out on his return to his party.

When he reached the point which had been indicated to him Dr. Lester climbed a fence and took a foot-path through the woods. He was not in a happy mood. He did not experience the relief from anxiety and consequent elevation of spirits which, as might naturally be supposed, would come to him from a knowledge of Ardis's safety. If his legs had not been so stiff; if his whole body had not felt so chilled that even exercise did not warm him, if he had had anything to eat since the middle of the day before, his mind might have been in a more hopeful condition.

The negro's statement that he had seen Ardis go back in a wagon was reason enough to make the doctor hasten to the inn without even the delay of a proffered breakfast. But the man might have been mistaken; and even if it were she who was taken back in the wagon, the doctor's mind was racked by thoughts that she might now be plunged in grief, and going back with the saddest news to tell.

The morning sky was covered with an unbroken expanse of grayish clouds, and although these had seemed to shine

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upon the lovers in the light wagon as if they had been polished steel, they presented no such appearance to Dr. Lester. Their gray gloom helped to sadden a world which already seemed gloomy enough to this anxious, shivering, weary, true-hearted gentleman.

After walking about half a mile, the doctor came to a little stream, and he had scarcely stepped across it to follow the path which led around the roots of a great oak-tree upon the other side, when he was suddenly confronted by two men. He stopped short. The men were respectably dressed, although their clothes were spattered with mud and their soft felt hats were pulled down over their faces. They were silent, and neither of them moved limb or muscle. Even the cold morning wind which blew down the little stream did not sway them as they hung side by side from an outstretching limb of the great oak-tree. On the coat of one of them was pinned a paper on which were printed with a lead pencil these words:

"Hung for horse stealing. Look out, other fellow.'

There was no signature.

For a moment the doctor stood appalled, a cold moisture bursting out upon his hands and upon his pallid face. Then a horrible sickening fear came over him. Could one of these be the man for whom Ardis had come down here to search?

The inscription on the paper had been read at a glance, for the characters were large and distinct, but a glance was not enough to prove to the trembling doctor that neither of these men was Roger Dunworth.

A minute later the doctor staggered away. The effects of the shock were still upon him, but this horrible fear had been uplifted from his soul. The men were strangers to him.

Now there came upon Dr. Lester a wild desire to get

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away; and he began to run, and did not slacken his pace until he was out of the woods and on the main road. A suspicion that the danger might not yet be over, and that the "other fellow" mentioned in the inscription might be Roger, came upon him as he walked rapidly onward, but further consideration made him hope and almost believe that the three horsemen of whom he had heard but had not seen, and on one of whose horses Ardis had gone away, were, in reality, the thieves; and before he reached the inn his mind had begun to quiet itself from the tumult into which it had been thrown by what he had seen in the woods. But his anxiety for Ardis could not be quieted until he had looked on her, safe and sound.

When Dr. Lester entered the parlor of the tavern he was greeted with a loud shout from Roger Dunworth who sprang forward to meet him and seized him by both hands. To Roger's expressions of hearty delight the doctor made no answer. Tears came into his eyes, and he sat down upon the nearest chair. On the other side of the room he saw Ardis, bright as a star in heaven. Near by sat Mrs. Chiverley, a little pale from the turmoils of the night, but with a smile of happiest content upon her pretty face. Mr. Chiverley laid down the paper on which he had been making a sketch from the window, and came forward in gayest mood.

"What on earth did you do with yourself last night?" he cried. "We were beginning to think that you would have to be hunted up."

The doctor did not answer, but turned to Roger. "Was it you then," he asked, "who returned with Miss Ardis in a wagon?"

"Yes," said Roger, "did you see us?"

"No," said the doctor, his words coming from him in a low tone and slowly, "but I was told of it."

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"It was too bad, doctor," exclaimed Mrs. Chiverley, "that you were not here when they came back! I declare to you that this dreary looking country seemed like heaven when I saw those two sitting together in the wagon! If you had been here, doctor, the situation would have been perfect."

The doctor hesitated a moment, and then he said: "I wish I had been here."

Ardis now rose from her seat and approached him. "Dr. Lester," said she, "have you had any breakfast?"

The doctor looked up at her and shook his head. Then, without another word, she went out of the room.

"No breakfast!" cried Mrs. Chiverley. "You must be hungry! We breakfasted an hour ago; and we were only waiting for your return to start back to Atlanta."

"And in twenty minutes by the clock," said Roger, "if you had not appeared by that time, I should have been off in search of you."

Shortly afterward, as Dr. Lester was eating a hastily prepared breakfast at a corner of the dining-room table, Ardis came in and sat down by him. "Doctor," she said, "where did you stay last night?"

"At a house by the roadside," he promptly replied.

"How far was it from here?"

"I really do not know," said the doctor.

"And did you walk all the way there and back?" she asked.

"Of course," he said. "You know our good horse was taken." He spoke now with more strength and animation. The sense of thankfulness and peace was called forth as much by hot coffee as by the knowledge that all was well.

Ardis sat and looked at him for a few moments as he ate. She was about to ask another question when she

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heard the footsteps of some one approaching. "I want to tell you, doctor," she said quickly, "that all is right between Roger and me."

"I knew that," he said, "as soon as I came in."

An hour afterward our party set out for Atlanta. It was unfortunate to be obliged to leave without the horse which had been stolen from them, but his recovery was so exceedingly doubtful that they preferred to go without him, and to pay his value to the man from whom he had been hired, rather than to submit to delay on his account. The disabled horse seemed now somewhat freshened up, and Biscay was attached to one of the buggies. But as there were now five persons in the party, and places for only four, it was decided that the gentlemen should take turns in walking. It would be necessary to go slowly if they expected to keep their poorer horse in a condition to finish the trip. But during that day Dr. Lester did not walk a step; Ardis would not permit it. When his turn came she took his place, and as Roger walked with her, the horses were a good deal relieved.

On the way the doctor was told everything that had happened, and the more he heard the more firmly he determined not to mention what he had seen in the woods. In turning the matter over and over in his mind he came to believe that the great oak-tree in the forest would not have borne the weight which now slightly bent its outstretched limb had not Ardis recognized Roger's horse and ridden him away. In their mad pursuit after this valuable animal they had recklessly gone back in the direction from which they had come and with utterly worn-out horses had easily fallen into the hands of the men, who with determined and vengeful purpose were following them in the dark hours of the night. That one of them escaped was doubtless due to the fact that Ardis

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had taken the horse he had ridden, and that the hired animal he had abstracted from the tavern stable was not able to keep up with the blooded steeds of his companions. Almost certain it was that but for Ardis's interest in horses, her powers of quick recognition, and her habit of equally quick action, the weights which bent the long oak limb would now be riding on their way in stalwart health, and cheery mood. All this was so clear to the doctor, that he knew it would be equally clear to Ardis, and therefore she must never know it. And that it might not by any chance word come to her knowledge, he would speak of it to no one.

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CHAPTER XXXII.

ON the afternoon of the day on which Ardis and her party reached the little tavern in Georgia, the philosophizer Bonetti was walking on the road between his house and Bolton when he met Mr. Tom Prouter. The latter was in his dog cart, and was coming rapidly from the direction of Bald Hill.

"How-d'ye-do, Bonnet?" he cried, pulling up his horse with a jerk. "Do you know anything about Mr. Dunworth? Or where a man could find him, or write to him? I have been to see Dr. Lester, but he has gone away, nobody knows where, and I stopped at the Dunworth place, but Parchester and the others haven't a notion in their heads about him. And Major Claverden, where I stopped and took dinner, cannot tell me anything; even Miss Claverden is away."

"You don't suppose she could tell you anything, do you?" asked Bonetti.

"I don't suppose she could," said Prouter, "but I should like to have the chance of asking her that or anything else. I tell you, Bonnet, this country is getting to be a regular desert."

"It does look a little that way," said Bonetti. "But what started you up to be so sharp after Mr. Dunworth?"

"I want to sell him my milk route," said Prouter. "The confounded thing has got to be sold, or I shall be ruined, body, pocket, and mind; and I have got down to the belief now that he is the only man in this part of the world who is likely to buy it."

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"Because he is the only one you haven't asked?" said Bonetti.

"That may be part of it," said Prouter, "but the more I think of it the more I believe that he is the man. He has plenty of grazing land, and he might as well take the cows as not. I'll sell them to him as cheap as dirt, and throw in all the milk pans, churns, and every other confounded thing that belongs to the business. If I once see him I can put the matter before him so that he cannot help jumping at the bargain. By George, Bonnet, I'd give ten dollars if I knew this minute where Dunworth is!"

Bonetti did not immediately answer. He looked down at the road, and then at the young man in the dog cart. "Ten dollars?" said he.

Prouter glared at him. "Bonnet," he cried, "do you know where Dunworth is? Out with it, man, and ten dollars is yours." And thrusting his hand in his pocket he pulled out a wallet.

Bonetti folded his arms and cast his eyes again upon the ground. Why should he not help Prouter to find Dunworth? The one would be relieved of an onerous burden, and the other would be able to make a most advantageous bargain. He had Dr. Lester's Atlanta address, and there was no doubt in his mind that it was also Dunworth's. He had promised not to say anything about the expedition of Miss Ardis and her friends, but he had never said that he would not give Dunworth's address if he should happen to have it. Dr. Lester had asked him to communicate with him if it should be necessary, and it seemed very necessary indeed that Mr. Dunworth should be communicated with. This young Englishman was ready to sell this valuable property for a trifle, and it would be a positive wrong to Dunworth not to let him know of the chance.

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"Come, come, Bonnet!" cried Prouter, "What are you thinking of, man? Do you know, or don't you know?"

"Yes," said Bonetti, slowly, "I do know. Just about this time he ought to be at Didman's Hotel, Atlanta, Georgia."

"By George!" cried Prouter, "you are the very man I should have come to first!" And he pulled a ten-dollar note from his wallet and handed it to Bonetti.

The latter took it, rolled it up carelessly and stuffed it into his waistcoat pocket. When money was thus lavishly being thrown about the county he deemed it his duty to his family to intercept some of it for useful purposes.

"Atlanta, Georgia!" ejaculated Prouter. "How do you get there?"

"You go to Bolton, and take the train," answered Bonetti. "There's a train south in the middle of the night, and one at half-past five o'clock in the afternoon."

Prouter jerked out his watch. "Five minutes to four!" he said. "That gives twenty-five minutes to get to the Quantrills, fifteen minutes to change my clothes and pack a bag, twenty minutes to Bolton, ten to speak to the milk people, and a good quarter-hour to spare. By George! Bonnet, I'm off this afternoon! Didman's Hotel you said?"

Bonetti nodded, and in a moment the young Englishman was bowling away as fast as his horse could shake himself over the road.

Bonetti walked slowly homeward, his brow a little clouded. "I should not have done that," he said to himself. "It was a stupid mistake, and I ought to have known better. If I had said to Prouter, 'If you want to find Mr. Dunworth I'll take you to him:' he'd have agreed as quick as lightnin' to pay my passage to Atlanta; and if we hadn't found him at that hotel we'd have hunted him up;

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and I'd have had nothing to do with the expenses. It would have done me good to get away from here for awhile; and I could have split up a lot of wood for the women and gone with him just as well as not. Confound it! It was the stupidest kind of a mistake!"

Some hours later the train on which Tom Prouter had taken passage stopped at a junction of several railroads. The stop was long, ridiculously long, Mr. Prouter thought, and he laid down the novel which he was reading and went out to see what was the matter. He found that a certain train with which they were to make connection had not arrived, and that they were waiting for it. Further inquiries elicited the information that they might have to wait half an hour longer.

"Confound it!" said he. "If things go on in this way, Dunworth will have left Atlanta before I get there."

As he strode impatiently up and down the broad platform of the station, some one suddenly stepped in front of him, and said: "Hello!"

Prouter stopped, looked up, and recognized Mr. Surrey.

"Oh!" said he.

"Are you going north?" asked Surrey.

"No," said Prouter.

"Southward bound, then?"

"Yes," said Prouter.

"I am on my way up from Charleston," said Jack Surrey, paying no attention to the fact that Prouter showed very plainly that he took no interest in his communications. "It is a poor time to go north, but I got tired of it down there. And what is the news from Bolton? Is Miss Claverden there?"

"No," said Prouter.

"And our good Dr. Lester? He is on hand, I suppose?"

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"No, he is not," said Prouter; "he has gone away."

"Ah!" said Mr. Surrey. "And you are leaving, too! The neighborhood must be quite deserted. Going to Florida?"

"No," answered Prouter in a tone intended to cut off all further questioning. "I am going to Atlanta!" And he moved away.

Being thus abruptly left by the young Englishman, Jack Surrey walked slowly away in the opposite direction, and resumed the smoking of a cigar which he had held in his hand during his brief conversation with Prouter. He was in no hurry, for he knew that even after he heard the coming of the train for which two others were waiting, some time would be required for the transfer of the baggage and mails. So he leisurely walked up and down, and considered the situation.

He had gone south when he left Bolton and had wandered about a good deal, but perpetual bloom in semi-tropical air could not make him forget that he had not been able to have a satisfactory interview with Ardis Claverden in which he could set himself right before her, and know for a certainty if he had any chance of winning her. He gave no weight to her anger at his untimely proposal nor to her subsequent avoidance of him. Nothing but a plain, straightforward decision would satisfy him, and he had not lost faith in his own ability to influence that decision. He had heard from a friend in New York that Miss Claverden was staying there with the Chiverleys, and had afterward heard that she had gone south with them. Thinking that most probably this meant that she had returned to Bald Hill and had taken her friends with her, Surrey determined that he also would repair to that hospitable mansion and endeavor to come to an understanding with Ardis. He believed that her father was his

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friend, and that in Jack Surrey's opinion was not a bad element on his side.

But when he heard from Prouter that Ardis was not at Bald Hill his plans were upset, and he now set himself at work to endeavor to reshape them. As going south in her case did not mean a return to her home, what did it mean? He was almost certain that she and the Chiverleys were not in Florida, for Jack Surrey, when travelling, was a man who kept himself posted in regard to arrivals. Atlanta was suggested by the fact that Prouter was going there. That region would be attractive to artists, even in winter time, and perhaps they were on their way to New Orleans. Prouter's going to Atlanta was a fairly good clew, for he knew that the young Englishman had strong inclinations in the direction of Ardis, and he thought it probable that nothing would be more likely to take him to Atlanta than the fact that that young lady was there.

When Surrey had fully considered the subject, it seemed plain to him that not only would it be folly to go on to Bald Hill, but that if he desired to travel Ardis-ward he might as well go to Atlanta as anywhere else. For a moment he thought of asking Prouter plainly where she was, but this would unveil his intentions, and he believed the young man capable of sending him on a wrong track.

Having arrived at the end of his considerations Mr. Surrey stepped to the ticket office, made some arrangements there, and a few minutes afterward, Tom Prouter, who was again in his seat and engaged with his novel, saw him enter the car, preceded by a colored porter carrying a bag. The man came directly up to Prouter, and turning to Mr. Surrey said:

"You can have the upper berth of this section, sir, and that's the only one left. I'll make up the beds whenever you are ready, gentlemen."

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Prouter laid down his book and gazed with indignation at Surrey. "What's the matter?" he said. "This train doesn't go North."

"I know that," said Surrey, preparing to occupy the seat opposite Prouter, "but I am going South. In this country people are allowed to change their minds."

Prouter sat up very straight, and looked much as if he would like to change his mind and go North. "To what place in the South?" he asked abruptly.

"Atlanta," said Surrey, as he arranged himself and his effects on the seat.

For some moments Prouter said nothing, but gazed fiercely at the other. What in the name of all that was villanous did this mean? Why did this man suddenly determine to go to Atlanta? Could he suspect that Dunworth was there? How could he suspect it? The name had not been mentioned. At least Prouter thought not. He racked his brains to try to remember if he had said anything about him. And what could Surrey want with Dunworth? He had no interest in milk or cows, and therefore could not be expected to interfere with him. But he remembered that Surrey and Dunworth were rivals, and although he considered himself well up in his knowledge of America, he did not know what were the customs of rivals in this country, but he vowed to himself that if there was to be a quarrel he would see to it that his business was settled before Dunworth's mind was disturbed by extraneous matters. But above all, how did Mr. Surrey know that Dunworth was in Atlanta? And why did he so suddenly determine to go there?

These were questions too hard for Tom Prouter to determine, and he betook himself again to his book. The train had now started, and presently Surrey remarked:

"I suppose the porter will soon be coming along to

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arrange these beds. I shall go into the smoking-room. Do you smoke?"

"No," said Prouter without raising his eyes from his book.

Surrey found the smoking-room unoccupied, and he established himself comfortably in a corner. About five minutes afterward Prouter entered, and, seating himself as far away from the other as possible, proceeded to fill and light a short brown pipe.

"I thought you said you did not smoke," remarked Surrey.

"In this country," retorted Prouter, "people are allowed to change their minds."

Surrey smiled. "You positively hate me," he said.

"Yes, I do," answered Prouter shortly.

"Well," said Surrey, after a few puffs, "I don't particularly object on my own account to your state of feeling, but I should think it would be decidedly unpleasant for you. We shall have to travel together for some little time, and I know I should consider it a confounded bore to be obliged to screw my mind up to the hating point, and keep it there until we reached Atlanta. In order to be consistent one has to make himself so extremely disagreeable."

"I don't mind that," said Prouter.

Surrey laughed. "What was the original row?" he said. "I ask merely from curiosity. I have noticed that you have had this animosity on hand for some time."

Prouter could not well put into words the reason for his dislike of the other. In fact, he hated Surrey because that individual had always exhibited a certain minor contempt for him; and then, again, he hated him because he was a suitor of Miss Claverden, and occupied the position, in Prouter's eyes, of an impertinent interloper. The

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latter reason was not difficult for Surrey to divine, for Prouter's manner had frequently indicated it.

"Perhaps I can help you out a little," he said. "Is it on account of any attentions I may have paid to Miss Claverden?"

"That is part of it," said Prouter.

"Well," said Surrey, "it is a satisfaction to know just how the case stands, and if it is interesting to you to keep up your enmity I am sure I have no objections. I will merely say, however, that your attentions to Miss Claverden do not trouble me at all. You see what a charitable mind I have."

"Humph!" said Prouter. "A charitable mind is beastly."

The next morning these two uncongenial companions took breakfast together at a wayside station; Surrey seating himself in the first chair as he entered the room, and Prouter taking a place at the other end of a long table.

"How is the enmity this morning?" asked Surrey as they came out together. "Hot as ever, I suppose? I wish I had had a little of it to put into my coffee, for the stuff was decidedly cool."

"It's beastly tiresome," said Prouter sharply, "that you don't get angry. If you were half a man you would show it."

"But I am not half a man," said Surrey, "as I am prepared to show whenever occasion requires."

There was not much conversation during the rest of the journey, for Prouter invariably went into the smoking-room when Surrey was in his seat; and if the latter came into the little compartment, the former returned to his seat. To sit opposite and close to a man to whom he was obliged on principle to exhibit ill-will would have been a difficult task to the young Englishman, whose

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genial and companionable nature was not adapted to that sort of thing.

Surrey thought it wise not to say anything to the other about the object of his journey. Several times he had felt inclined to ask some questions, but, on second thoughts, decided to keep quiet. He felt quite sure from Prouter's manner toward him that Ardis was in Atlanta, and that the young man was going to see her. If that were the case he would also see her; and if she were not there it would be well to make his inquiries of some one other than Prouter.

They reached Atlanta about the middle of the afternoon, and Tom Prouter immediately began to lock himself up as if he had been an iron safe. It might have been supposed that he had been sufficiently shut up before, but now one might almost imagine the click of the patent locks as he buttoned up his coat, firmly closed his lips, and with bag and umbrella in hand, and eyes staring straight in front of him, strode out of the station. He paid no attention to the importunities of hack drivers, for Surrey might be near and would hear the address he would have to give the man. He had never been in Atlanta, and had no idea of the situation of Didman's Hotel. His only present object was to get away from Surrey. When he had accomplished this he would inquire about the hotel. He walked away rapidly, not caring whether he turned to the right or the left; but in less than a minute Surrey was walking by his side.

"You don't intend to take a carriage?" said the latter.

"No," replied Prouter, turning upon him fiercely.

"If you had done so, I was thinking of joining you," remarked Surrey. "Have you far to walk?"

Prouter stopped short and glared at him. "It is none of your business," he said, "whether I go far or near.

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You can go your way, and I shall go mine. I don't want you to take a cab with me, or walk with me, or have anything to do with me."

Surrey smiled. "You keep up the enmity admirably," he said. "It is the most interesting case of the kind I ever met with. But you will allow me to say that I came to Atlanta because you were on your way here. Atlanta is open to the public, and I have a right to come to it. If you are now going to any place of public entertainment, I have as much right as you have to go there and I shall exercise that right. Of course if you go to a private house, that is another matter. But if you do not wish me to walk with you I shall take to the other side of the street. If you choose to project your enmity over there through the trucks and wagons I do not object."

Prouter gave vent to an angry ejaculation and passed on with quick, strong strides, turning aside for no one. He was furious. How could he rid himself of this fellow? He felt inclined to take advantage of the loop-hole of escape which had been offered him by his enemy, and actually contemplated going up to the first private house he came to and asking permission to remain there for ten minutes. Americans had so many unconventional customs that this might not be considered an odd request; but he was in a business street and passed no private houses. As he became warm by exercise he walked more and more rapidly; thus hoping to distance his persistent follower, and by turning some corner to elude him.

But Surrey, who was unencumbered with anything save a light bag which hung by a strap from his shoulder, easily kept up with him. Prouter, looking neither to the right nor to the left, strode past a large building without regarding it; but Surrey, his gaze constantly thrown across the street, in order that he might not lose sight of the

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other, saw standing upon the portico of this building a man whom he recognized. He immediately ran across the street, caught up to Prouter, slapped him on the shoulder, and exclaimed: "Hold up! Didn't you see Dr. Lester as you passed that hotel?"

Prouter stopped. "Dr. Lester!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Surrey. "If you don't want to see him you can go on. I shall go back to him."

Prouter did not hesitate. "Dr. Lester!" he exclaimed again. "What is the meaning of that?" And he immediately walked back with Surrey to the hotel.

When Dr. Lester, standing near the door of Didman's Hotel, saw these two men coming up the steps toward him, his heart sank. He was not in a very happy mood anyway, although he had been assuring himself over and over that he ought now to be one of the most cheerful fellows alive, and when his eyes suddenly fell upon Prouter and Surrey, full of life, vigor, and animation, he was almost as much shocked as when he came upon the two immovable men hanging from the limb of the great oak tree.

To Prouter by himself he would have had no particular objection, but in the doctor's eyes he seemed to be bringing with him the most direful of evils. Surrey was the cause of the misery that had been just passed through. He could reappear only as the cause of further misery. What this further misery could be, or how it could be caused, the doctor did not consider. Surrey had come; that was enough!

Tom Prouter rushed up to Dr. Lester and immediately seized him by the hand. "By George! sir!" he exclaimed. "I did not expect to see you here. And is Mr. Dunworth with you? Where is he? Can I see him?"

The doctor did not immediately answer. He had been

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so reticent in regard to Dunworth that this habit of prudence had not yet left him. But a moment's reflection showed him that there was no reason whatever why all the world should not know that Dunworth was here; and he informed Prouter that that gentleman was stopping at this hotel, but that at present he was not in the house. He believed, however, that he would shortly return.

On receiving this intelligence Tom Prouter immediately left the doctor, and established himself in an arm-chair on the piazza in a position where he could see every one who came up the steps, and could also have a good view up and down the street. At all hazards his business with Dunworth must be arranged before Surrey had had an opportunity to distract his mind.

Surrey's meeting with the doctor was neither hasty nor enthusiastic, but it was marked with easy civility on the one side and a severe frigidity on the other. Surrey apparently took no notice of the doctor's forbidding manner, and after a few casual remarks inquired if Miss Claverden were with the party at the hotel. Under other circumstances this question would have surprised the doctor; but the moment he saw Surrey he was sure that he had come after Ardis, and the first shock had been followed by a sickness of heart which Surrey's words had no power to increase. He made no conjectures in regard to the manner in which this man had discovered that Ardis was in Atlanta. She or any one of the party might have written the information to friends, but it was a matter of no importance. Surrey was here; that was the only thing to be thought of.

But while he was thinking, Surrey was waiting for an answer. It was contrary to Dr. Lester's nature to tell a lie; and, besides, in this case a lie would be foolish and useless. So he answered "Yes."

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Surrey asked a few questions about the Chiverleys, whom he had heard were Ardis' travelling companions and whom he had met in New York. And when with an apathetic brevity these had been answered, he went into the hotel. He asked nothing about Mr. Dunworth, for he had no reason to suppose he was there, Prouter's questions having been asked in a low tone, when he was at the top of the steps and Surrey at the bottom.

Having registered his name and ordered that his heavier baggage be brought from the station, Surrey proceeded to the room allotted to him, and put himself into a condition to make an afternoon call upon a lady. When this had been accomplished to his satisfaction he went downstairs, and sent up his card to Miss Claverden. In a few minutes the waiter returned with the information that the lady would receive him.

Ardis had been fully prepared for the reception of Surrey's card, for Dr. Lester had lost no time in informing her of the man's arrival. She much amazed her old friend by exhibiting no displeasure at this intelligence, and by actually saying that she should be glad to see Mr. Surrey.

"After all that has happened!" exclaimed the doctor.

Ardis smiled. "It is because of what has happened that I wish to see Mr. Surrey. It is odd that he should be here just at this time, but it happens very well, for the sooner I see him the better."

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CHAPTER XXXIII.

WHEN Ardis entered the parlor where Surrey awaited her, there was upon her a radiance of beauty in which no man had ever seen her before. It is true that she had just parted from Dr. Lester, but he had not seen her truly. A cloud had risen before him which dimmed all things.

Nor had Roger looked upon her thus. The party had reached the hotel that morning; and early in the afternoon, when the Chiverleys had departed for the suburbs of the city to sketch, and Dunworth was away attending to some business prominent in which was the transportation of his horse to Bolton, Ardis had made a total change in her outward appearance. Discarding the somewhat hoydenish travelling costume in which she had journeyed into the back country, she had selected from the trunks which had been left at Atlanta the clothes in which she thought Roger would like her best. Every fold of her light dress, every piece of falling lace, every curl and wave of her dark hair, had been arranged to please Roger. She not only knew his tastes, but she knew how to gratify them, and the joy it gave her to gratify them bestowed an added deftness upon her fingers and an added acuteness to her perceptions of the charms of a toilette.

And she was also charming because she knew that Roger would think her charming, and the light which this knowledge had thrown into her dark eyes was still there.

The effect upon Surrey when Ardis entered the room

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was rather an odd one. The moment his eyes fell upon her the thought flashed into his mind that there had been a mistake, that it was some one else and not himself whom she expected to see. Ardis Claverden had never come like this to welcome him.

But when with smiling eyes and lips she stepped quickly toward him, he saw that there was no mistake.

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Surrey," she said. And the two seated themselves near a window of the vacant parlor.

Surrey's words of greeting were few and commonplace. It was seldom that he felt himself thrown from his balance, but he had that feeling now. It did not suit him at all to have Ardis say that she was glad to see him. He had not expected it; he was not prepared for it; and he did not understand it. Looking upon the case from his point of view, Ardis ought not to be glad to see him; or, if she were, she ought not to show it. In their last interview he had offended her, and she had been very angry; and, since that, she had avoided him in a determined manner. He had come prepared to explain, to expostulate, to plead. He believed himself capable of making her see him in the light in which he wished to be seen; and when once recognized in that light, he had strong faith in his power of making her feel that he truly loved her. When he had made her feel this Jack Surrey believed that there would be no good reasons for despair.

But that she should be glad to see him disconcerted him. There must have been some radical change in the condition of things; and how to adapt himself to such a change he could not imagine. Ardis did not give him much time for cogitation.

"I did not expect to meet in Atlanta one I knew," she said, "but I am pleased that it has happened so, for it

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gives me an opportunity of making a beginning in my announcements of my engagement to Mr. Roger Dunworth."

"Roger Dunworth?" said Mr. Surrey.

"Yes," Ardis answered.

Jack Surrey was a man who was in the habit of making strong fights. He had had no reason to suppose that Ardis had ever loved him, or that she would hold herself from love of other men until he could persuade her to love him. Without regard to these, or any other conditions, he had come to win her, if valiant fight could do it. And even now when he heard she had been won by another he could not promptly retire from the field. He was not one who could give up the game when checkmate was called. He must search carefully to see if, by any possibility, he might make another move. It had happened to him in times gone by that he had made another move and had himself called checkmate.

Not downcast, but with his eyes fixed upon the floor, Surrey sat silent a few moments. Ardis, on her part, remained silent also, and leaning back in her easy-chair she looked at him. This man had been the cause to Roger and her of so much misery, and to some of her friends of so much trouble and anxiety, that she might have been excused had she looked with satisfaction, and perhaps with something of triumph, upon his present discomfiture. But she was too happy now to think of what had passed. No thoughts of doubts, of fears, of hardships and dangers came to her now; they were dimmed and lost in the brilliancy of the great joy of knowing that Roger belonged to her, and she to Roger.

But although she bore no resentment toward this man who had given her all the real sorrow she had ever known, she did not pity him. In fact, the only feelings she had in his direction were those of gratification that his most

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unfortunate and unhappy influence upon her life was at an end, and that so soon an opportunity had come to her to show to him promptly and clearly the position which, hereafter, he must occupy toward her.

All this was very pleasant to Ardis. It was as if some good angel had sent Surrey here in order that the stamp and seal might be put upon the grand transaction of her life.

Suddenly Surrey looked up. "It is fixed and settled, then," he said, "that you are to marry Mr. Dunworth?"

"Fixed and settled," replied Ardis. And as she spoke there now first came to her a feeling of triumphant pleasure in the utter defeat of this reckless and obstinate pursuer. This feeling was not a very strong one, nor did it take entire possession of her. But it may have shown itself in the quick, bright flush upon her face, for as Surrey looked at her a shadow seemed to come upon him, and he fixed his eyes upon the floor.

Presently he looked at her again and said: "You may think I am slow in offering my congratulations."

Ardis smiled. "I had not thought of it," she said, "but you do seem a little tardy about it."

"Miss Claverden," said Surrey, "I never spoke a word to you that did not come in all truth and honesty from my heart, and I shall not now begin to speak in a different way. I offer you no congratulations because I have none to offer. This may be blunt, but it is honest."

"It is blunt," said Ardis, "uncommonly so. And do you not wish me happiness?"

"I wish you every happiness that humanity is capable of," said Surrey, "but that is not congratulating you."

"Perhaps you think," said Ardis, "that if I had made a different choice I might have been a better subject for congratulation."

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"Since you ask me," said Surrey, "I will answer that I do think so, most decidedly."

This remark, given in a tone which plainly indicated that he would have been willing, had he been allowed, to point out the better choice, produced such an effect upon the lively spirits of Ardis that she could not forbear a little laugh. "You are charmingly frank," she said.

"Miss Claverden," said Surrey, turning quickly toward her, "will you tell me one thing? Do I owe to any rash and blundering act of my own the bad fortune which has fallen upon me?"

"I will speak as plainly as you do," said Ardis, "and will say that the matter was decided independently of anything you could possibly say or do."

"That may seem crushing," said Surrey, "but in fact it gives me a certain satisfaction. I am glad to know that I do not owe my misfortune to my own folly."

Ardis laughed again. "Are you as easily satisfied as that?" she said.

As she spoke, her enjoyment of the ludicrous element of the scene lighting up her face, she turned her eyes and saw Roger Dunworth standing in the middle of the room.

When Ardis looked upon her lover, although he stood but for a moment, and said not a word, a horrible sickening chill ran through her and she rose to her feet. Her face turned pale, and she opened her mouth to speak. But before she could utter a word Dunworth was gone.

Surrey rose also. To a degree he comprehended the situation, although he saw no reason for such a strong exhibition of emotion. But he knew his part was played and his exit was in order.

"I will take leave of you, Miss Claverden," he said, extending his hand. He was about to add some further words, but Ardis simply looked at him without touching

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the hand he offered. She could not believe that this man had again come between her and Roger; she could not believe that Roger could be so hot-headed and unreasoning; but all her old aversion to Surrey suddenly arose in redoubled force, and she shrank from him. She would as soon have touched the paw of a hyena. Surrey bowed, without a word, and left the room.

When Roger Dunworth returned from his business in the city—business very much hastened by his desire to get back to the hotel which held Ardis—he was stopped at the front door by the beaming Tom Prouter. Roger was, of course, greatly amazed to see the young man, but was also very much pleased. In his present frame of mind it delighted him to meet a friend and neighbor; and in a moment he was plunged into a conversation about cows, milk pans, and wagons.

The young Englishman gave his mind solely to the business on hand. He made no allusion to the fact that Surrey had come with him, for he felt sure that this information would distract Dunworth's attention; and, once distracted, he might not be able to get hold of it again. Dunworth did not want a milk route, but he was in such a pleasant and accommodating mood that he allowed himself to be impressed by Prouter's arguments; and when he arose he promised Prouter that as soon as possible after he reached home he would go and look at his stock, and would then come to a final decision in the matter. Prouter was so well satisfied with this result that he considered he had made a virtual sale of the greater part at least of his fortune-sapping property; and he went to the office to engage a room for the night.

Dunworth hurried up into the parlor where he hoped to find Ardis. He had advanced well into the room, when his progress was suddenly stopped by the sight of the lady

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for whom he was looking seated near Surrey by one of the windows. The unexpected sight of Surrey was enough to astonish Dunworth, but to see Ardis seated by him engaged in what appeared to be a very intimate and interesting conversation astounded and shocked him. But that which affected him more than anything else was the appearance of Ardis. He had left her a girlish figure in a short blue suit very much the worse for wear, and her charming face shaded by a soft felt hat. He now saw her, beautiful in his eyes beyond all expression. He saw her arrayed in flowing folds of soft white cashmere, lace and silk; a narrow velvet ribbon round her neck from which hung a sparkling jewél; bands of gold about her round, white wrists; and the beauty of every feature intensified by the light that came from her happy heart.

And all this for Surrey!

Dunworth was not a man who could readily express his emotions in words. In fact, deep emotion for the moment silenced him. What he had seen had been seen at a glance. The effect was equally instantaneous. Everything had suddenly and absolutely changed. He ought not to be here. As quickly as he had entered he turned and went out.

The instant that Ardis was left alone she rose and rang the bell. When a waiter appeared she sent him to find Mr. Dunworth and to ask him to come to her. Then she sat down to wait, and very shortly it came upon her that she had done a foolish thing. Why should she so discompose herself? Why should she send for Roger? He had come in, he had gone out, and would come back when he was ready to do so. Perhaps he did not wish to speak to Mr. Surrey. That would be natural enough. But all her reasoning could not take the chill from her heart. It grew colder and colder.

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The man returned and reported that Mr. Dunworth had gone out. Then Ardis sent for Dr. Lester; and when he came she told him, briefly but clearly, what had happened.

But the doctor was not in a condition to give her comfort. The heart-chill had come upon him an hour or more before it had struck her. His quick sensibilities had told him that a blight was about to fall upon the woman he loved; and now that it had fallen, the manner of its fall was of little import. But if he allowed this almost superstitious despair to take hold of him, he would not show it to Ardis.

"I will go and find Roger," he said. "I will explain everything to him and will bring him to you."

"There is nothing to explain," said Ardis, with a little flush.

"Of course not," said the doctor. "But you want to see him; that is enough. I will go and tell him so."

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

ROGER DUNWORTH was not naturally a jealous man, nor was he one who often allowed his anger to get the better of him; but of all men he had ever met with, Surrey possessed the greatest power of exciting in him jealousy or anger. The cool assumption of the elder man could not fail to arouse the hot resentment of the other.

But as Dunworth walked quickly out of the parlor and down the stairs, and through the wide public hall into the street, he was neither jealous nor angry. His emotions had not crystallized themselves into any definite form. As has been said before, he had received a shock, and, in a manner, he had been stunned.

There was nothing in the world at this time of any importance to Roger Dunworth compared to the facts that he and Ardis loved each other; that they were to marry and live together all their lives. All that he intended to do, and all that he hoped to accomplish, was to be done for her and to be done with her. He had never loved any one but Ardis, and it seemed to him that he had loved her all his life. Now she belonged to him and he to her, and this was the great truth of his existence.

Upon a mind in this sensitive and exalted state the vision of his betrothed, more beautiful than she had ever appeared before him, closeted, as it were, with an abhorred rival, struck upon him with a powerful and peculiar force.

As he walked rapidly up the street his most powerful

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motive was to get away from Surrey. This was the first thing to do. Then all manner of conjectures rushed wildly upon him. Why did the man come here? How did he know Ardis was here? Had she expected him? And why had she not spoken of it? And what did she mean by asking Surrey if he could be satisfied with so little?—the only words Roger Dunworth had heard.

As he walked and thought and his mind became somewhat clearer, he firmly determined he would do one thing. No matter how this meeting and conversation had come about, he would not be jealous of Ardis, he would not doubt her. He was sure that she would tell him everything. Having told him that she loved him, he did not in the least expect that she would now tell him that she loved another. Whatever explanation she might give him, he would dispassionately hear, and although he might not like what he heard, he knew that Ardis was reasonable as well as true, and he did not doubt she would give him a fair hearing, and act justly. Above all things he would not doubt her.

But he could not talk to her nor hear her talk while Surrey was there. He must give that man time to get away. And so he walked and walked, and tried to think over the whole matter; and the worst thing a man like Roger Dunworth could do was to walk and walk and try to think over the whole matter. He thought so much and walked so long that at last he was surprised to find that it was growing dark.

As he retraced his steps toward the hotel he began to feel uneasy in regard to his own conduct. Surrey must have left Ardis a long time before; and although she might excuse Roger's abrupt withdrawal from the room, she must wonder at his protracted absence. He did not wish her to imagine for an instant that he believed her to

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be less loyal than himself, and his heart smote him as he thought that he had given her reason for such supposition.

Dr. Lester had gone out in search of Roger, but the young man had turned up a by-street which led into the country, and the doctor could not go into all the by-streets which led into the country. The Chiverleys had returned from their sketching expedition, and wondered why Roger was not there and why Ardis was not ready for her dinner.

Ardis had waited in the parlor for a long time, but neither Roger nor the doctor returned, and at last she began to feel that she had not only been chilled but that she had been wounded. Was Roger a man who always took offense and showed resentment without giving the slightest oportunity for explanation? His action plainly showed that he considered there was cause for disapproval of her; and even if she could admit that she had given him apparent reason for such supposition, he had no right to act upon it alone. After all that had happened, he should have been the last man to make up his mind in a case like this without hearing what she had to say about it.

After thinking a long, long time she went up into her room. She did not wish to see any one until she saw Roger. Of course her friends could easily imagine the nature of what had occurred, especially as a similar thing had occurred before. Surrey had come there; Roger had gone away; it was plain enough what they would think. She was ashamed, and growing angry. No matter what had happened, Roger should not have treated her thus.

On his way back Roger became more and more convinced that he had made a grave mistake by precipitately leaving the hotel and staying away so long, and yet he could not compose his mind into the proper condition to

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speak to Ardis as he wished to speak to her. Visions of Surrey continually arose before him, and dispelled the earnest gentleness with which he intended to clothe his thoughts. The evening was well advanced when he went into a restaurant and ordered a meal. He believed that rested and refreshed he would be better able to do what was before him.

When at last he reached the hotel he had decided to go immediately to the parlor; and if Ardis were not there, to send for her and request an interview. As he passed through the lower hall he saw no one he knew except Prouter, in an adjoining room with his back toward him sitting at a table against the wall, busily writing. It now struck Roger that he would like to see Dr. Lester. It might be well to have a word with this good friend before proceeding further.

He turned aside and went into the reading-room. There was only one man there, and that man was Mr. Surrey. As Roger entered the other looked up from his paper.

These two men had frequently met but had had very little to say to each other. Apart from the fact that he was bound upon general principles to object to the existence of a man who was his rival, Surrey had not cared about Dunworth to an extent sufficient to make him dislike him.

This evening the mind of Mr. Surrey was in as gloomy and melancholy a condition as its owner had ever permitted it to enter. His love for Ardis had truly been the most ardent and earnest of his life, and his reliance upon himself had been so great that his belief in his ultimate success had never wavered. But now he knew for a certainty that Ardis belonged to another, and that he must with the best grace possible admit his absolute and definite defeat. This was a duty which hitherto he had

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so seldom been called upon to perform that he found he was rather rusty at it. He would allow himself, however, no trifling with himself. The affair was settled, and thus was nothing left for him to do but to settle himself as well and as soon as he might. In pursuance of this resolution he had determined to let every one see that he had accepted the fortunes of war. He would show no ill-will toward any one concerned in the matter, no bad feeling whatever, and if by frank exhibition of a generous nature, he should provoke the slightest feeling of regretfulness in the mind of Miss Claverden, he would accept the evidence of such feeling as a palliation for his misfortune.

Toward Dunworth he intended to show a marked magnanimity. It was not the young countryman's fault if Ardis preferred him to an accomplished man of the world who knew what a thoroughbred woman needed to make her happy; and his success was no just cause for enmity. In fact, Surrey considered it pure nonsense to be angry with any one. He liked to be on good terms with people or on no terms at all.

These conclusions were logical and sensible, but Mr. Surrey had not adopted them without first throwing his mind into a very perturbed and unhealthy condition. He had called the matter settled, however, and had taken up the paper hoping to divert his mind into a more restful condition. But when he looked up and perceived Dunworth standing within a few yards of him and saw his face darkened by an uncontrollable expression of antipathy and even abhorrence suddenly called up by this unexpected meeting, all his good resolutions vanished and hot anger came to the front.

"Stop that!" he said fiercely, throwing down the paper. "I want you to stop looking at me in that way! You have done it before and I have had enough of it!"

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"I shall look as I please," said Dunworth without moving.

"No, you shall not!" said Surrey, rising to the feet. "At least, you shall not look at *me* as you please! It is my private opinion you are an ass! You have behaved like a spoiled child; and now that you have got what you want you are not satisfied and stand up there and make faces. Now, I wish you to understand that so far as I am concerned this sort of thing may as well come to an end."

When Surrey had finished, Roger, without a word, made two quick strides toward him, but before he reached him a man slipped quickly in between the two. It was the clerk of the hotel who had been attracted by Surrey's loud and angry voice.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we can have no personal altercation in this hotel."

Roger was quite able to hurl the interfering clerk out of the open door, but this sort of thing was wholly foreign to his nature and education. Although without hesitation ready to resent an affront, his inherited ideas taught him that a gentleman should not indulge in a broil.

"I shall settle this matter in another way," he said as he left the room.

"All right!" Surrey shouted after him. "Settle it as you please! I shall be ready for you!"

Dunworth went into the room where Prouter was writing and interrupted his scratching pen. "Prouter," said he, touching him on the shoulder, "I want you to do something for me."

"What is it?" exclaimed Prouter, pushing back his chair and springing to his feet. "Name your business. I am your man."

"I want you to take a challenge from me to Mr. Surrey, who is in this hotel."

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Prouter whistled. "Ho! ho!" he cried. "Here is a go! Do you mean to fight a duel?"

"Exactly that," said Dunworth. "That man has foully insulted me. I presume he is not such a particular friend of yours that you will object to be my second."

"Friend!" exclaimed Prouter. "I hate him from his hat to his boot heels. He came down here with me and made me angry enough to break his head with a beer bottle. Oh, this is larks, my boy! I'll be your second, quick as lightning. Now what have I got to do? Just let me finish off this letter and post it. It is to my mother in England, telling her I have sold the milk route. It will make her happy, and it's the regular thing to send off a letter like this before a duel. Now just let me skip over to the desk and get a tuppence-ha'penny stamp, and then I'm ready for you."

Dunworth took no notice of the precipitate assumption that he had actually concluded his bargain with Prouter when he had merely shown a favorable disposition in regard to it. In a moment the young Englishman came bounding back to him.

"Now, what am I to do?" asked Prouter. "All I know about duels I got from Charles O'Malley; but Charles was a good touchy fellow, and I don't doubt he knew what he was about. I am ready to go in any way you like; Irish fashion with pistols, or sprigs of shilaly; French style with rapiers; or American style with lassos or whatever way you do it over here. Name your tipple."

"All you have to do," said Dunworth, "is to go to Mr. Surrey and tell him that I insist on satisfaction for his insult to me. He can either apologize or meet me, whichever suits him better. As to time, place, weapons, and all that you can arrange with his second. I think you will find Mr. Surrey in the reading-room."

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"Good!" cried Prouter. "And I'll plump it on him without waiting a minute. By George! this is larks! Lots better than serving milk, I can tell you!"

Prouter now hastened away, and Dunworth walked very slowly toward the broad stairs which led up to the parlor floor. He was trying to make up his mind what he should say to Ardis. Of course he could not tell her of the business on which he had sent Prouter. But he had not yet had time to decide how he should explain to her his abrupt departure and his long absence from the hotel. As he went up the stairs he determined that he would be perfectly frank with her. He would tell her how he came to suddenly leave the room; why his mind had been so greatly troubled; and what he had been thinking and resolving. She should know everything except his recent meeting with Surrey. Then she should tell him what she had to say, and they would talk over the matter earnestly and kindly. That was the way in which every apparent difference between Ardis and himself should now be settled.

But when he reached the parlor he found only Mr. and Mrs. Chiverley, who were very anxious about him. They were certain something had happened, but did not know what it was; for Dr. Lester had again gone out to look for Roger, and Ardis had been entirely reticent on the subject of her lover's non-appearance and had early retired to her room.

Roger eagerly inquired for Ardis. Mrs. Chiverley jumped up and said she would go to her room and get her to come down. The little lady was delighted to fly upon this errand. She had heard of the arrival of Surrey, although she had not seen him, and she was afraid he had occasioned some new trouble between Ardis and Roger, and that the latter had perhaps gone away to South

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America or to Europe. But now she was sure that everything must be all right, for here was the lover anxious to see his lady.

Mrs. Chiverley found her friend preparing to retire. It was quite plain that the information that Roger was in the parlor desiring greatly to see her, gave Ardis relief and pleasure; but she did not consent to go down. To go into the parlor now to receive explanations or to give them would be very formal business. Whatever Roger had to say to her, she had a great deal to say to him, and the public parlor at this hour was no place for such a conversation. They could meet early in the morning, and then, if they chose, could take a walk and have their talk.

"Do you know how late it is?" she said. "It is nearly ten o'clock. I shall not go down again to-night. I think you must be tired enough to go to bed, my dear, but if you intend to return to the parlor, and should see Mr. Dunworth, will you tell him that I shall be up early, and will see him to-morrow morning before breakfast?" And she gave Mrs. Chiverley a good-night kiss.

"Whatever has happened," thought that lady, as she went down-stairs, "and I don't believe it was anything of importance, I wish Mr. Dunworth had had that kiss."

Roger was greatly downcast by the message, and sat silently gazing upon the floor. Mr. Chiverley was talking to a little girl belonging to a party at the other end of the room, and who had found out that he was a natural friend of children; but while he talked to the child his eyes were anxiously fixed upon Roger. A quick thought now flashed into the mind of Mrs. Chiverley. Calling the child to her, she took her rosy face between her hands and kissed her.

"Do you see that gentleman over there?" she whis-

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pered. "Go to him and give him that kiss and tell him it is from Miss Ardis."

"Are you Miss Ardis?" asked the little girl.

"No," said Mrs. Chiverley, smiling, "but she gave it to me, and I gave it to you, and I want you to give it to him."

The child laughed. "That is funny!" she said. "I'll go and do it!"

The little girl approached Roger, and in a low voice said to him: "Please put down your head, sir. I have a kiss that belongs to you."

Roger looked at her for a moment as if he were trying to fix his thoughts upon her, and then he said: "What do you mean, little girl?"

"It is only a kiss," she said, "and it comes from Miss Ardis. Do you want it?"

The sudden joy that flashed into the face of Roger startled the child and she stepped back; but in an instant she was caught in his strong arms and lifted to his face.

"That is all," she said, with a little struggle. "Put me down." The moment her feet touched the floor she slipped from him, and with a little laugh over her shoulder, ran away.

"Josie, where have you been?" asked her mother when the child joined the group at the other end of the room.

"I have been carrying kisses," she said, "just like a postman delivers letters, except that I only had one."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed her mother. "To whom did you take a kiss?"

"To a very nice gentleman, mamma, and a lady sent it."

"Josie, I am perfectly amazed!"

"Mamma," said the child, standing up very straight

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and flushing a little, "You need not begin to scold me, for I am sure that if you had known how glad he would be to get it, you would have been perfectly willing to carry it yourself."

Mrs. Chiverley had seen how glad he was to get the kiss, and the sight sent her to bed happy. "If that is the way he feels," she said to herself, "there is certainly nothing the matter. And even if there has been the least little cloud between them, it will blow away the minute they come together." And the little deception she had practised did not weigh upon her conscience in the least.

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CHAPTER XXXV.

ROGER went to his room jubilant. If Ardis had sent a little girl to give him a kiss, it showed that this was still a world of joy, in which she was the noblest, loveliest being breathing. There was something so charming, so delicate and yet so forcible, in the means which she had taken to show him that although she did not come down to him she did not wish him to forget that she was his very own, that the enraptured lover could scarcely restrain himself from bursting into triumphant song. He had not long luxuriated in these delightful emotions when Tom Prouter came in.

"All settled!" exclaimed the young Englishman. "Everything ready and right as a trivet! By George! I am glad to see you in as highcockalorum a humor as I am! And I don't wonder at it. The thought of punishing such a downright rascal as that Surrey is enough to put anybody in good spirits. Do you know what he did when I took him your challenge? He accepted it instanter and then he burst out laughing because I brought it. He said my bringing him a challenge fitted in more beautifully than anything he had ever seen. It was such an absurdly perfect fit that it was positively ludicrous. By George! he made me so angry that I was ready to take a second mortgage on him myself!"

"What have you settled upon?" asked Roger.

"The first thing we did," said Prouter, "was to get him a second. He don't know anybody here, and you told me you didn't want Dr. Lester or your friends to

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know anything about it. So we got the day clerk of the hotel. The night clerk said he would be perfectly willing to oblige us, but he had to be on duty until breakfast and so couldn't get away at daybreak. But the other clerk got up out of his bed and talked over the matter with us, and was as obliging as anybody could be. In fact, he managed the whole thing. He provided the pistols, fixed the time, and said he knew of an excellent place not far from the hotel where we would run no risk of being disturbed at an early hour in the morning. Now, really, Mr. Dunworth, your hotels are very different from ours. You can call for a cocktail, a theatre ticket, or a second in a duel. By George, sir! I believe if you rang your bell and ordered an articulated skeleton the waiter would bring it up!"

"It is decided then," said Dunworth, "that we are to meet early in the morning?"

"That's it," said his lively second, "and you need give yourself no further trouble about it. I'll call you when it's time to get ready to go."

Prouter left Roger Dunworth in a very different mood from that in which he had found him. When he thought of the cold-blooded performance which was to take place the next morning, he cursed in his heart the man who had brought this thing upon him at this time, when life was just opening before him in all its true glory and joy. He felt a fierce impatience for the hour to come when he might destroy and utterly put out of the way this demon of bad omen, who seemed continually to rise between him and happiness. Otherwise, at the very marriage altar he might expect him to appear.

But at this thought the tenor of his feelings changed. There might be no marriage altar! What a dreadful business it was that at the very opening of his new life he

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should voluntarily allow this life to depend upon the arrangements of the hotel clerk and Prouter and upon the accuracy of Surrey's aim! Reason was ready to tell him that he had no more right to thus expose the life he had given to Ardis Claverden than he had to recklessly expose to peril anything else which she held dear, and which was her own. But before his inherited ideas of honor reason was obliged to step aside. To be a coward was for him simply impossible, and to his mind nothing could be more cowardly than to shrink from this combat. He could not appear before Ardis knowing that he had saved himself for her by an act of cowardice.

Although his feelings of indignation and abhorrence toward Surrey did not, in the least, abate, he no longer felt that savage desire to annihilate him. If he died, it should be with clean hands; and if he lived, it should be with clean hands. His idea of courage was to face death, not to inflict it.

It was a long time before Roger went to sleep. But when he dreamed it was of the kiss that Ardis had sent him, and not of the affairs of the next morning.

Ardis slept well, without dreams, and having gone to sleep so soon, she awoke very early the next morning. It was just beginning to be light, but she could see it was going to be a very beautiful day. She had slept with her window curtains drawn and one of the sashes raised. The weather was very mild, even for this region, and the air which came through the window was balmy and delicious. The days were lengthening; and when Ardis pulled her watch from under her pillow she saw that it was even earlier than she supposed, and so she lay down again and thought.

Her thoughts were very pleasant ones. Her resentment toward Roger had entirely died away, and the fact that he

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had wanted to see her proved that he was in a satisfactory state of mind. If he had behaved foolishly he would get a scolding, and no doubt that would do him good. But she would not even assume that he had behaved foolishly. She would wait and hear what he had to say; that was just and fair. It might be something had occurred which he could not mention before Mr. Surrey. This state of the case did not appear very probable, but she would wait and hear. Whatever Roger told her she knew would be the absolute truth.

She now began to calculate how soon she might get up. She did not want to be wandering about the hotel before other people were out of their beds.

"At eight o'clock," she said to herself, "we shall breakfast, if we are to leave in the morning train. At half-past seven Roger will surely be down-stairs, probably waiting in the parlor, and then we can have a walk and a talk. I have no doubt he is as wildly anxious for a talk as I am. I shall need half an hour to dress, so I suppose I ought not to get up before seven."

The hotel was at some distance from the business part of the town, and in its rear were gardens, and a grove stretching away into the suburbs. The birds were now beginning to sing and chirp, and as Ardis lay and listened to them she envied them. "They can get up when they please," she thought, "without waiting for other people. The most beautiful part of the day belongs to them. After a time, when everything is fixed and settled, there is going to be a reform in regard to these beautiful hours of the early morning; at least in the lives of two people whom I know."

This thought called up others about the lives of two people, which were very charming thoughts to think as she lay there, idly and happily breathing the morning air and looking out on the beautiful morning sky.

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Suddenly she heard a shot, quickly followed by another. At this sound her face flushed, and her brows slightly knitted.

"It is a shame," she said to herself, "an outrageous shame, for people to shoot the birds as they do. Of course it is not necessary to shoot these little creatures, and it is sheer wantonness and cruelty, especially at this hour, which is the birds' own time of day."

And then she began to think what she would say to some one on the subject of unnecessary shooting, although she did not believe there would be the slightest need for counsel of the sort in that quarter. And now she forgot her momentary anger, and began to watch two white clouds which were floating, one after the other, across the sky; and in her playful fancy she called one of them Roger and one herself. The following cloud appeared to her to move faster than the other, and as they passed out of the space of sky visible to her, Ardis sat up and leaned forward so she could continue to watch her clouds; and when they disappeared they were very near each other.

"They are sure to touch," she said, as she lay back on her pillow. "Now, I wonder whether that cloud that tried so hard to overtake the other was Roger or I. As things have gone recently, it might be supposed that I was that cloud. Perhaps it was so, and if it was, it shall be charged to the account of contrary breezes. All that we need think of is that at last the winds of heaven blew those clouds together, and that ought to be enough to make anybody happy." And now she looked at her watch and saw that it was seven o'clock.

Ardis was about half-dressed when there came a quick treble-knock at her door, and in a moment Mrs. Chiverley ran in. She was pale and excited, and there were tears in her wide-open eyes.

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"O Ardis, dear!" she exclaimed. "Don't be frightened! It is all right now, and Mr. Dunworth is perfectly safe!"

Ardis had sprung toward her. "What do you mean?" she cried.

"Oh, there has been a duel," said Mrs. Chiverley, "early this morning—just a little while ago. But you need not be in the least troubled, for Mr. Dunworth was not hit at all and Mr. Surrey was only pinked. That is what Mr. Prouter said, who told us about it, and Mr. Chiverley explained that that meant a very slight wound. So there is nothing to grieve about, dear Ardis, and we ought to be thankful that it turned out as it did."

Ardis stood like a statue; her eyes very bright, and fixed upon her friend. Presently she said: "Do you mean to tell me that Mr. Surrey and Mr. Dunworth have fought a duel?"

"Oh, please don't look at me like that, Ardis!" cried Mrs. Chiverly. "They did fight a duel, and nobody knew anything about it except that young Englishman and some one connected with the hotel. Mr. Prouter was a second, and he has just told all to Dr. Lester and Mr. Chiverley and me. Mr. Dunworth sent Mr. Surrey the challenge last night, but they kept it perfectly secret."

"Mr. Dunworth sent Mr. Surrey a challenge?" said Ardis, speaking the words very slowly, and in a voice that did not seem exactly her own.

"Yes," said Mrs. Chiverley, the tears now running down upon her cheeks, "and we know everything about it. I don't believe you understand, Ardis, that Roger Dunworth is perfectly uninjured and Mr. Surrey is only slightly touched. So why will you look like that?"

"Where is Mr. Dunworth?" said Ardis.

"I don't know," replied her friend. "I have not seen

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him. But of course you want to see him, and when you do you will find that what I have told you about his not being hurt is perfectly true. Shall I send to him, and tell him you would like to see him in the parlor?"

"Thank you," said Ardis, "I wish you would. I shall be down very soon."

As Ardis turned to finish her dressing Mrs. Chiverley gazed at her for a moment. It did not surprise her that her friend should be deeply affected by the news she had brought, for such news about a lover, no matter how the affair had ended, was enough to give any woman a shock; but she could not understand why Ardis should look more and more unlike herself even after she knew, or ought to know, that nothing serious had occurred. But she said no more, and hurried away to send the message to Dunworth.

When Ardis came down-stairs, about ten minutes afterward, she found Dr. Lester alone in the parlor. His face had been troubled, but it became much more so when his eyes fell upon Ardis. He came forward and took her by the hand.

"My dear Miss Ardis," he said, "have you been made to understand that Roger is wholly unhurt?"

"I know it," she said. And as she spoke the doctor felt his heart grow numb within him. His nature was very sensitive and there was something in the tone of her voice which appalled him.

"Doctor," said she, "is there a room where I can talk with him undisturbed?"

The doctor's eyes brightened as he heard these words. "Certainly," he said. "There is a little parlor opening from this one. Will you step in there? And shall I send Roger to you?"

"If you please," said Ardis.

When Roger opened the door of the little parlor Ardis

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was standing in the middle of the room. Shutting the door with a thrust he made a quick step toward her. But she shook her head.

"I have something to say to you, Roger," she said, "and you will please listen."

He, too, when he heard her voice, felt a numbness creeping upon him. He stood still and gazed on her.

"Roger," said she, "you challenged Mr. Surrey to fight a duel about me. I was not told so, but I know it was about me. Unless I were concerned, you and Mr. Surrey would have nothing to do with each other. Roger, you have been very jealous of Mr. Surrey. You have shown that in the strongest possible way. But I could easily forgive it when you showed it by going away from me, from your home, and everything, because then you did not know that I loved you. Whether you had good reason or not, you thought that I loved some one else, and you had a right to be jealous and to be broken-hearted, and to do what you pleased. But now, Roger Dunworth, everything is different. I have told you that I love you. I grieved that I let you go so long without knowing it; and I travelled hundreds of miles, and endured hardships and dangers to tell you. And after all I have done to show you what I felt, and after all we have said to each other you do not trust me, you do not believe in me."

"Ardis!" exclaimed Roger. "How can you——"

"Let me speak," interrupted Ardis. "Stay where you are. I say you do not trust me. You find me talking with Mr. Surrey; you dash away; and that very night you send him a challenge. Now, it does not matter whether you were jealous or not, that showed a shameful want of trust in me. If you are jealous at such a time as this, that is enough to prove all I have said; but even if there were any other reason for you to risk the life

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which you had just given to me and risk it without one word to me was the cruelest want of faith in me. Do you not suppose that I would have supported you in anything that was brave and honorable? I have loved you truly and loyally, and, what is more, I love you now. But you have shown, as plainly as it could be shown, that you do not trust me, that you do not believe in my love. And I will not marry a man who does not trust me. Now you can go your way and I will go mine."

As she spoke the last words she moved quickly toward the door, but before she reached it Roger sprang toward her and clasped her in his arms.

"Ardis," he cried, "take back those words! Ardis! My Ardis!"

As he spoke he strained her to his heart, but with a strength which surprised him, she unclasped his arms from around her, and darted out of the room.

At the end of the large parlor she found Dr. Lester waiting, anxious and apprehensive. "Doctor," she said, and as she spoke her voice was nearly choked with tears, "there is nothing more between Roger and me. He does not trust me, and I will not marry a man who does not trust me. Now I want to go to Bald Hill just as quickly as I can. Will you attend to our getting off?" And she went to her room.

In little more than an hour after that, Ardis and Dr. Lester, with the Chiverleys, were on a northern-bound train. The latter two had not intended returning with the party, having proposed a short sketching tour in the South; but when they heard what had happened there was no further thought of sketching. Mrs. Chiverley's tender heart would have ceased to beat before it would have allowed her to leave Ardis until she had seen her safe at home and in her father's arms.

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Roger remained standing where Ardis had left him, staring straight at the wall in front of him, seeing nothing and hearing nothing but the soul-deadening words she had said to him. Every syllable sounded in his ears as if it had been just spoken. He stood thus until a servant came and touched him on the arm, having previously tried in various ways to attract his attention, and told him that she wished to sweep the room.

As Roger could not have known Ardis so long without loving her, it was also impossible that he should love her so long without knowing her well. And he knew that the one thing that would make her cast off a dog, a friend, or a lover was the belief that that dog, friend, or lover did not trust her. And this, with reason, she now believed of him.

If it had been the other way, if she had had cause to distrust him, he believed that in time she would have forgiven him. But now he could not believe that she would forgive him. To do what he had done at the time at which he had done it, and without her knowledge, could not fail to be in her eyes an insult as well as a crime.

But Roger did not despair. He must see Dr. Lester. Instinctively he turned to this old friend. He knew that Ardis would not see him at present, but the doctor could see her. He would pour out his heart to the doctor and trust in his friendship.

But Dr. Lester was not in the house, and after making himself certain of this fact, Roger went up to his room. When he came down again he was surprised to hear that the Chiverleys, Miss Claverden, and Dr. Lester had gone to the station to take a through train to the North. This news astounded him. It had been planned that the party should leave Atlanta about noon, and return to Virginia by the way of Savannah and Charleston; probably leaving

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the Chiverleys at the latter place. But now they had gone directly home!

Dunworth rushed out of the hotel, jumped into a cab, and drove rapidly to the station, but he was too late; the through train had gone. When he returned to the hotel he made no inquiries about Prouter or Surrey. He did not know the latter was wounded and no thought of either of them entered his mind. At the suggestion of the clerk he had some breakfast; and then, in a state of nervous irresolution, he considered the situation. What he wanted to do was to go by the next train to Bolton—to Ardis. But what would be the good of that? His reason, even his heart, told him it would be of no good at all. He did not despair, but he knew it would be folly to try to see her now.

As it would be well for him not to follow Ardis too closely, Roger determined, on his own part, to carry out the original plan of the party, and to go home by the way of Savannah and Charleston. In Atlanta he could not stay a moment longer than was absolutely necessary.

The express train by which they had expected to leave did not start until noon, but Roger felt he could not wait for that. He must leave this hated city at the earliest possible moment, and therefore had himself and his valise taken to the station in time to catch the morning accommodation train for Savannah. This travelled slowly, but it left soon.

In Savannah he wrote a letter to Ardis. Hours of continuous thinking had led him to believe that this would be the best thing for him to do. He could state his position clearly and without interruption; and if, in consequence, the slightest chance should be given him, he felt himself able to plead his cause in person in such a way that Ardis—who loved him, for she had told him so—

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would take back the words she had spoken. The hope grew within him that she would give him that chance. She must have been very angry when she spoke to him on the morning of the duel; and he did not blame her for it. But such anger could not last forever. The home influence must count for something. Could she be, at Bald Hill, among the scenes of their youth, as unrelenting as in a strange city? Her father, he believed, would prove his friend in this matter. It was not likely that he would be so severe a judge as his daughter. The frank-hearted major had long since let him know that if he could choose a son-in-law he would choose him. And on this knowledge Roger counted much.

Roger asked that the answer to his letter should be sent to Charleston; and he waited in that city until it came. Ardis' reply was brief. It ran thus:

"I was angry when I spoke to you; but that makes no difference. What I said then is my firm conviction now. The man who does not trust in me, or who omits all consideration of me when he deliberately risks his life, cannot be my husband. No matter whether he has done right or wrong, he cannot be my husband. There could not be mutual belief between us, and therefore there could not be happiness. My decision is carefully considered and final."

When Roger read this letter he did not feel that he knew Ardis any better than he had known her before. He was merely reminded that in writing to her he had allowed himself to forget what manner of woman she was.

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CHAPTER XXXVI.

TOM PROUTER had been up the greater part of the night cleaning and polishing pistols and discussing the code of honor with the night clerk. He had risen very early in the morning; and when his services upon the duelling-ground had been concluded, and he had told the story of the affair to the Chiverleys and Dr. Lester, he considered that he was entitled to a short nap. He slept so soundly, however, that probably he would not have wakened until afternoon had not his friend, the night clerk, come up to his room a little after ten o'clock.

"I have come to consult with you," the clerk said, "about what is to be done with Mr. Surrey. I have sent for a doctor, but he has not come yet, and I don't know any other physician that I would care to call upon, for in cases like this we have to be very careful. And when the doctor comes somebody ought to be on hand to talk to him and explain matters. Billings was very willing to act as a second, and I was glad to be of what service I could; but it won't do for either of us to be mixed up in the matter. The gentleman may not be much hurt, but then again he may be mortally wounded. I can't make out how he was hit. It seems to me a queer kind of wound, and I don't understand it."

"All right! All right!" cried Prouter, springing from the bed and pulling out his watch. "I didn't know it was so late! I'll look into that Surrey business," he continued, as he hurriedly put on his coat, "but first I must see Mr. Dunworth and make arrangements for going North with him."

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"Mr. Dunworth!" said the clerk. "He left for Savannah half an hour ago! The rest of his party had already gone North on the Washington express."

"The rest of his party!" shouted Prouter. "Who are they?"

The clerk looked surprised. "I supposed," he said, "that knowing Mr. Dunworth you knew them all. There was Mr. and Mrs. Henry Chiverley, Miss Ardis Claverden, and Dr. R. C. Lester."

Prouter stood petrified. He had made for himself a very definite plan of action. He had determined to wipe from his soul every taint of milk. He would go back to Virginia with Dunworth and immediately settle the transfer of the milk route and its appurtenances. No question of price, or anything else, should be allowed to stand in the way. Then, as soon as the money for which he had already written to his mother should arrive from England, he would add to it whatever he should be able to save from the wreck of his latest enterprise, and go into some business suitable for a gentleman. It appeared to be necessary for a young man to have some business if he wished to stand well in the opinion of people in this part of the world; and to stand well in the opinion of some of these people was, at present, Mr. Prouter's hot desire. But this sudden departure of Dunworth in the wrong direction was ruin to his plans. That dreadful weight of cows, wagons, and milk pans still hung around his neck.

He gave vent to a sounding objurgation. "Confound Dunworth!" he ejaculated. "Why did he bolt off to Charleston without letting me know? I had business of far more importance than anything that could have taken him there! I was going back to Bolton with him this morning!"

The clerk could give him no information, and Prouter

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continued: "There's another thing! I never saw such tiresome luck as mine! I didn't see Miss Claverden at all and I'd have given a horse to see her! I hadn't a notion she was here. Confound it! I'd go North this minute—for I don't suppose it's any use to try to follow up Dunworth; he may be going to the West Indies for all I know—but I can't do either thing. I'm tied up here in the beastliest way."

"How is that?" asked the clerk.

"It's that vile, beggarly, shabby, contemptible, good-for-nothing hound of a Surrey! You tell me he has gone and got himself wounded, and as he doesn't know a soul here to put him into proper hands now, or to ship his carcass to his friends in case he pegs out, I suppose, as I took part in the affair, I have got to stay here."

The clerk replied that it would be very well indeed if some one who knew the wounded man should stay here; at least until it should be decided whether or not his condition was dangerous.

"It is the vilest shame," said Prouter. "And all for such a worthless dog, who jams himself into everybody's business and spoils everything."

Growling that he had lost the chance of even a few minutes' conversation with the most charming woman he had ever known, and grumbling because nobody had told him that she was there, Prouter went up to Mr. Surrey's room to ascertain the condition into which that most inconvenient person had got himself.

"Here's a pretty kettle of fish," said he, as he opened the room door.

Surrey was lying on a lounge, partly dressed, and with his left shoulder and arm enveloped in a complicated bandage.

"I should say so," said he, turning toward the incomer.

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"If you intended to come up here at all, why didn't you come before, while the doctor was here, and back me up in the story I had to tell him?"

"You needn't suppose I'll back up your stories," snapped Prouter.

"I told him the exact facts," said the other, "but I must admit they sounded absurd. His belief was that I had been fired at from an upper window or from a tree-top, and as I had nobody to support me in my statements, I suppose he will continue in that opinion."

"He must be an everlasting ass," said Prouter. "Does he suppose anybody would fight a duel with one of the principals in the top of a tree?"

Surrey laughed. "He does not believe it was a duel at all," said he.

"Let him think what he pleases," said Prouter. "If he hadn't come while I was in my room talking to the clerk I might have set him straight. How were you hit, anyway?"

"Just on the top of the left shoulder," said Surrey, "and the ball went down in an oblique direction and came out about two inches below. I don't suppose it is a bad wound, but I shall have to keep quiet for a while."

"By George!" exclaimed Prouter. "Somebody must have fired at you from a tree! It couldn't have been any of Dunworth's friends, now could it?"

"Nonsense!" said Surrey. "The thing is easily enough explained. Dunworth and I both fired in the air, but his aim was too near the perpendicular, and the ball in falling struck me on the shoulder. Everybody knows that a ball falling from a considerable height will come down with almost as much force as that with which it went up. It was a good line shot that he made."

"Well, I'll be hanged," said Prouter, "if that isn't just

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like you! I'll bet six guineas to sixpence that you either made one step backward or a step forward, and so got under the ball. And more than that, I never did hear of such a stupid, muddy-headed piece of folly as for two men to go out to fight a duel, and then both of them to fire in the air! You might as well have each staid in your own bedrooms and fired your blasted pistols into your wash-hand basins."

"Better, as far as I am concerned," said Surrey, "for then I should not have been hit."

"And a great deal better, as far as I am concerned," said Prouter, "for then I shouldn't have been tied up by the leg to this beastly business, and cut out of a chance even to speak to Miss Claverden; and she in this very hotel up to half an hour ago!"

"Miss Claverden!" said Surrey. "Was that poor lady cut off from a chance of speaking to you? Indeed, I pity her! And so she has gone?"

"Yes, and that's a nice kettle of fish, too," said Prouter, "now that I have thought it over! Here is Miss Claverden gone off to Bald Hill with the doctor and those other people; and here is Dunworth pitching off to Savannah and nobody knows where else besides. There has been a row. That is plain enough. By George! I believe you are a double-barrelled nuisance! On the one hand you come down here and set people by the ears with your stupid duels; and at the same time you interfere in my business by driving Dunworth away just as he was about to buy my milk route. The thing was as good as settled until this row came on. By George! I wish you had fought a duel with some other ass on your way down here, and that he had shot you!"

"The other ass didn't challenge me," said Surrey, "although I noticed that he seemed in a suitable humor for

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such business. But do you mean that there has been a misunderstanding between Dunworth and Miss Claverden, and that they have gone away in opposite directions?"

"I said," replied Prouter, "that they went off at different times and in different ways. If that ball had gone into your skull instead of your shoulder, it would have let in enough light on your brain for you to see for yourself that there must have been a row."

"I am sorry to hear that," said Surrey, and for a time he was silent.

"If I had been in Dunworth's place," said Prouter, "and you had come down here after Miss Claverden—and I dare say that is what you did come for—I would have shot you like a dog."

"I have no doubt," said Surrey, "that if you had done it at all you would have done it like a dog."

"And why, in the name of all that is stupid," said Prouter, "did you fire into the air?"

"I didn't want to hurt him," said Surrey. "I knew that he was engaged to Miss Claverden, and I fired into the air out of regard for her."

"And, like as not," said Prouter, "you hit some pious old widow picking up sticks. It would serve you right if her body was to be fetched in now."

"Not in here, I hope," said Surrey. "And do you know I haven't had any breakfast yet? Will you ring that bell? And when the man comes I will tell him what I want."

Prouter rang the bell, and then he turned and again addressed Surrey. "By George!" he said. "You have the most beastly, monotonous way of making trouble! First you had that rumpus with that wild man of the woods in those underground holes at Ridgeby—which half the people believed was a put-up job—and so got

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yourself laid up at Bald Hill, where you weren't wanted. And now you've gone and acted in the same tiresome way, and got yourself hurt again and laid up. And this time it is my business that is knocked into a cocked hat!"

"Look here," said Surrey, "what will you take for your milk concern?"

"Take!" cried Prouter. "You needn't suppose I'd sell it to you! By George! if you were to go about serving milk in Bolton, you'd make a row in every family in the place."

Here the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of a waiter. When Surrey had ordered a slight repast Prouter remarked:

"I haven't had any breakfast, either. I've a mind to order some brought up at the same time, if it wouldn't make your temper any worse to see a man eat a Christian meal."

"My temper can stand it," said Surrey. And Prouter ordered a bountiful breakfast, with beer.

When the meal had been finished and the things taken away Surrey remarked: "I don't suppose it will injure my shoulder for me to have a smoke. Will you be good enough to hand me that paper of cigarettes from the mantel-piece? And the match-box, please?"

Prouter did as he was asked, and Surrey suggested that he should help himself to a cigarette.

"Never smoke 'em," said Prouter. "I dare say, now, the smell of a decent pipe would swell up that shoulder of yours."

"Not a bit of it," said Surrey. "Smoke away, if you want to."

Prouter pulled from his pocket a little brown pipe and a bag of tobacco, and sat down by the open window, where, for some time, he puffed in silence. "By George!"

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he suddenly cried, springing to his feet. "What a jolly notion that up-shot shooting would be for a fellow who wanted to commit suicide, especially if he had a fancy for a rifle, as many fellows have. He could just hold his gun straight up, perpendicular, present arms; then pull the trigger and step forward twelve inches, and the ball drops on his head, and, most likely, goes through to his boots. That is a deucedly good idea. You might put a round bit of white paper on top of your head and see if you could hit it. It would make the thing interesting."

Surrey laughed. "And if you happened to be an Englishman," he said, "you'd make a bet with yourself that you couldn't hit the paper once out of three shots."

Prouter gave a grunt. "It's not a bad notion," he said, "but I dare say you couldn't be persuaded to try it."

"Not at present," replied Surrey. "You see, my left shoulder will be stiff for a while, and I couldn't present arms. By the way, I suppose you will be going out for a walk presently?"

"Of course I shall," said Prouter. "I can't stay long in this cooped-up hole."

"Then I shall be obliged to you," said Surrey, "if you will get this prescription made up for me. It is some sort of a smear, and does not have to be used until afternoon, but I might as well have it on hand."

Prouter took the paper, put it in his waistcoat pocket, stuffed his two hands in the pockets of his travelling-jacket, and marched out of the room. He strode along the streets until he came to an apothecary shop, and entering, he presented the prescription to a clerk.

"What's that for?" he said.

The man looked at it. "It is an ointment," he replied, "but, of course, I don't know what it's for."

"Give it back," said Prouter. "A man who doesn't know

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what stuff is intended for doesn't know enough to make up stuff for me."

In the next shop he entered, the attendant in charge expressed it as his opinion that the ointment was intended for a cut or a wound of some sort.

"Good!" said Prouter. "You know your business. Go on and make it up. I'll take a spin along the street and come back and get it."

Surrey's wound was not a severe one and healed rapidly, but it was four days before his physician told him that he was fit to travel. During this time Prouter remained at the hotel, giving Surrey a good deal of gruff and vituperative social intercourse, and attending to his various needs and wants with every indication of hearty disapproval.

Surrey never asked him how long he was going to stay in Atlanta, nor why he staid at all. He knew his man too well and found him too useful to enter into the discussion of that subject. He bore with unruffled good-humor the most blood-thirsty hopes for his speedy extinction, and the reiterated expressions of undying hatred of his purposes, his principles, and his practices; and when he wanted anything done he asked Prouter to do it, and in every instance it was done. Thus it happened that these two left Atlanta together and journeyed to Bolton; Prouter much angered by the notion which had suddenly come to him that by this time Dunworth might have met with some one else who had a milk route to sell and had bought it.

A short time before their train reached Bolton, Prouter came to Surrey—they occupied seats at some distance from each other—and said: "What are you going to do? Shall you travel on to your home—if you have any—or do you intend to stop at Bolton and make more trouble?"

"I shall go straight on to New York," said Surrey.

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"Didn't you know that I bought a through ticket at Atlanta?"

"How should I know?" said Prouter. "I wasn't listening to you when you booked. And, besides, people may stop over on through tickets."

"But I shall not," said Surrey.

Prouter stood for some moments, bracing himself, on account of the motion of the car, against the side of Surrey's seat. "That will be the best thing you can do," he said. "I don't suppose there is a person in these parts who doesn't hate you as he hates the devil."

At this remark a young woman in the seat in front of Surrey turned half-round and looked at the two men, after which she resumed her former position, but listened attentively to the rest of the conversation; while a man behind them fixed his eyes upon Prouter with an interested grin.

"Do you intend to stay on here," asked Surrey, "after you have got rid of your lean kine?"

"Yes, I do," said Prouter. "I am going into another business."

"Matrimony, perhaps?" asked Surrey.

"It will be that if I choose it," retorted the other.

"Any particular person?" asked Surrey.

Prouter did not immediately answer. He seemed to be considering the subject. "It may be a very particular person," he said presently, "and Bald Hill is her home. And I want to say to you, fair and square, that if I go in for that sort of thing you'd better not get in my way! There is nothing I'd pitch into quicker than a dog in a manger!"

"For your own good and the comfort of the lady," said Surrey, "I would advise you to drop that notion. Her affairs are settled. She is engaged to be married."

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"She *was*, you mean," said Prouter, quickly, "but that is broken off. If the whole thing hadn't been knocked higher than a kite, as you Americans say, the man wouldn't have gone off in one direction and the lady in another. I shall pitch in on my own account!"

Surrey smiled. "I think you were going to mention some other business; something, perhaps, that you can do better."

"Of course I meant another business," replied Prouter. "I am going into vine-growing. I decided to do that yesterday morning. I shall set out a big vineyard. It will be a jolly sort of life. I'll build a little house right in the middle of it, with windows all around so that I can shoot the thieves who come after my grapes. Two rooms down stairs and two up. Have a woman to come in and cook. Jolly independent, all that! I'll sleep in one of the bedrooms myself. I dare say you'll never have the cheek to show yourself in this part of the country again; but if you should ever happen to come down here on any decent business, and if no gentleman should want you in his house, you might stop with me."

"Thanks for making yourself such a striking exception," said Surrey. "If I come down here, and you have your little house, I'll stop with you. But your plan for a snug bachelor's establishment doesn't agree with your matrimonial intentions."

"Confound it!" exclaimed Prouter. "That slipped my mind! I'll be hanged if you don't always make trouble! Now you have knocked that thing into a cocked hat! Of course she wouldn't come to a shanty in a vineyard! Every time you open your mouth or lift a finger you make trouble."

At this outburst Surrey was much amused, and so was the young woman in front and the man behind them.

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"Don't be angry," said Surrey. "Perhaps I may meet somebody who wants to go into milk; and if I do, I'll send him straight down to you."

"Milk!" said Prouter scornfully; and he strode back to his seat.

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CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHEN Ardis with her friends reached Bolton she was met by a delighted but astonished father. He had been informed by telegraph that they would arrive, but he could not imagine why she and the Chiverleys should wish to be in Virginia at this season. To come from the South to this raw, chilly air, to the dreary roads rendered almost impassable by the thawing of the red clay, and to the general unpleasantness of a country landscape just emerging from winter into a very uncertain and sloppy spring was not what he would have expected of them.

But that Ardis wanted to come to her home and to him, no matter at what season, was a joy to his heart until the two had sat together by the library fire and she had told him her story.

She began at the beginning and told him everything; and as he listened sometimes his eyes filled with tears of fatherly affection, and sometimes they sparkled with fatherly pride. Did ever man have such a daughter? But when, at last, she told him how it had all ended, his heart sank and he bowed his head. He was greatly grieved and disappointed. But when Ardis had finished and looked up into his face, waiting for him to speak, he took her into his arms and pressed her brave heart against one every whit as brave.

"My dear child," he said, "I sorrow much that the end of it all should be what it is; but had I been in your place, I would have done what you did; provided, indeed, I had had the courage to carry out my principles. And for

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all that you have dared, and for all that you have done, and for all that you have lost, I love you better than I ever did before."

After this the father and daughter talked no more upon the subject. Ardis endeavored, in a measure, to resume her ordinary Bald Hill life, but she did not make a success of it. Planks had to be laid, on which she could walk to her studio; and when she got there she found the great room very cold and disagreeable, the largest of wood fires failing to make much impression upon its stored-up chilliness.

Norma Cranton tried to get over to see Ardis, but the road between Heatherley and Bald Hill was very bad, and when she had gone about half-way her carriage stuck fast, and she had to be taken back home in an ox-cart.

Besides Dr. Lester, who would have walked on a fence-top to get to Bald Hill, Ardis had but one visitor, Mr. Egbert Dalrymple. He had been enjoying a social season in Washington, and had thrown up all the delights of the capital upon hearing that Miss Claverden had returned to her home.

And on the day after his arrival at his father's house, he presented himself at Bald Hill in a new suit of the shade of a pussy-willow, and a blossom of premature spring in his buttonhole, while his legs, and even the skirts of his coat, were bountifully bedecked by the red and very seasonable splashes of color bestowed upon them by the road. Several times his horse had been almost mired, but Mr. Dalrymple was bound to reach Bald Hill; and by dint of making several cross-country cuts he succeeded.

This young gentleman did not in the least endeavor to disguise the object of his visit. He came to woo Miss Claverden; and the plainer this purpose should be to all parties who had a right to be concerned, the better he

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would be satisfied. He did not know, nor did he care to know, whether or not she was engaged to any one else. He intended to woo and to win her, and to the consideration of obstacles he gave no thought whatever.

As opportunities for private converse with Ardis were extremely uncertain, Mr. Dalrymple had determined to declare his passion during this morning visit, and he certainly would have done so if Mrs. Chiverley had given him a chance. The soul of that lady was filled with thoughts of Ardis, and she watched her with that tender solicitude which a woman has who grieves for another. With that clear vision which enabled her to see what people ought to paint as well as what they had painted, she saw the purpose which this young man had painted on his countenance, and she resolved that she would give him no opportunity to worry Ardis.

She succeeded perfectly in warding off Mr. Dalrymple's intended action; and at last that young man suddenly arose, took abrupt leave of Ardis, not noticing the other lady, and went out. He stopped for a moment on the porch. Folding his arms he looked about him; at the milk-and-water colored sky, the oozy lawn, and upon the bare-twigged trees, vainly holding up their rounded but still tightly imprisoned buds to the impotent and sickly rays of an intermittent sun. He frowned and nodded his head; then ejaculating "So!" he went down and mounted his muddy horse.

As he slowly waded and splashed home the soul of Egbert Dalrymple was filled with loathing of that woman, Mrs. Chiverley. He had never met any one who acted so disastrously upon the harmonies of his nature. She unattuned him. She jangled the chords of his every sympathy. He had never seen any one who had so slight an appreciation of the fit. If she had remained quietly seated

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in the room wherein he had stood gazing down upon Ardis it would have been better, for then he would have invited the impulse of his dreams to stroll with him in the open, but just as he thought to speak of this, this woman would go out, and then, before he could subdue the discord in his soul, back she would come; bringing in one instance her utterly extraneous husband, with whom she said she was sure he, Egbert Dalrymple, would be glad to be acquainted. Bah! what a world! It would be simply impossible for him to touch the strings of his passion's lute if he did but know that such a woman was in the house! Happily, he had heard her say that her stay at Bald Hill would not be long. He would give her time to depart, and then he would return, and again standing before Ardis, would touch that note which must raise in her fair soul a vibrant swell.

In four days he came again, and found that Mr. and Mrs. Chiverley had gone to New York and had taken Ardis with them. When this news was delivered to him by a servant at the door, he turned without a word and went away. Not even his favorite monosyllable was tossed out upon the moisty air. When he reached his home he muttered to his family a few words indicating his intention to depart, tossed carelessly some articles of clothing into a valise, and gave orders for something to take him to the station. When his sister asked him to leave his address, he gazed for a few moments over her head and then said:

"Write to me at the outer courts of Paradise."

"Does that mean, 'Care Mr. John S. Buckley, 386 Lafayette Place, New York'?"

"As you will," he said, and went his way.

Mr. and Mrs. Chiverley had talked a good deal upon the subject on which Major Claverden and his daughter spoke not at all, and they had not found it difficult to

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convince each other that Ardis ought not to stay at Bald Hill, but should go with them to New York and finish the visit that had been so suddenly broken off. In New York they could give her a great many other things to think about. They did not expect to drive from her mind the recollection that she had been forced to discard the man she truly loved, but they hoped to cramp and crowd those recollections.

These ideas of the Chiverleys were strongly indorsed by the major. The great desire of his life was to see his daughter happy. He even preferred to have her happy than to have her with him. He believed she was much more likely to be happy in New York than at Bald Hill, and he urged her to go with her friends. He had other reasons for Ardis' continuance of her visit to the Chiverleys than those he gave her. He mourned deeply this breaking off of the match which he had had in his heart, and he could mourn better if she were away. Now, although she could not be said to be cheerful, she neither spoke of the storm through which she had passed, nor did she allow its effects to appear upon her, and so long as she preserved this demeanor he could do no less than to observe one equally as unperturbed; and this did not suit the major. When anything was the matter with him he liked to show it. An honest exhibition of his grief did him good.

It was not difficult to persuade Ardis at this time that the metropolis was a better place for her than her Virginia home. She was too young, she said to herself, to allow this great unhappiness to overshadow all that part of her life which was to come. And if it were right to do a thing, it must also be right to endeavor to cease to regret the doing of it. She would go away for a time, and then she would come back to her father the same cheerful, earnest daughter,

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the same enthusiastic worker at her art, and the same cheerful manager of her household that she had been the spring before. She might find that she had been too much hurt to do all this, but she resolved to try, and she had great faith in herself.

Thus it was that Ardis and the Chiverleys started for New York on the day before the two travelling companions, Messrs. Surrey and Prouter, reached Bolton. The first of these continued on his northern journey; while Prouter repaired to his home at the Quantrills' enlivened by a new idea. He would talk over his affairs with Miss Airpenny. Perhaps that very sensible and practical old frump might like to undertake the management of a milk route. He considered it a great piece of stupidity in himself that he had not sooner thought of this.

As soon as Major Claverden had been left to himself, General Tredner having gone away some time before, he sent for Dr. Lester to come and make him a protracted visit. And now, day after day, these two sat over their books, their newspapers, and their backgammon; and night after night they smoked their pipes before the wood fire in the great library fire-place; and the major talked and the doctor listened.

"A better man than Roger Dunworth," the major said, not once but often, "could not have been found for Ardis. I think you will admit that, sir. Everybody will admit that."

Here the doctor would remove his pipe from his lips and bow his head affirmatively.

"He is a Virginian; he is a neighbor; his father was my friend, and his grandfather was a friend of my father. I have looked upon him, sir, as one who was born to be the husband of my daughter. As a man, what more could be desired? Noble to look upon, with the soul of his

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fathers in a strong and handsome body; and, in character, just the man I should have chosen; brave, trustworthy, honorable, and far beyond the young men of this day and region in those qualities which bring success and prosperity. I tell you, sir, it is too bad! It is too bad! And what makes it worse, sir, what makes it crushing to me, is that there is not another man whom I have ever known, or whom I have ever seen, who is suitable or worthy to be the husband of my daughter. In other parts of the country there may be such men, but they are not Virginians, they are not my neighbors, and I do not wish to consider them. Can you tell me, doctor, of a man in this part of the country, in all the circle of our acquaintance, in whose hands you would advise me to lay the hand of my daughter, and say to him: 'Take her'?"

At such words as these the doctor would look into the fire and harden his face, but he could not harden it so hard that the major would not lean over, and putting his hand on his shoulder, say:

"I see that you sympathize with me, good old friend. I can see that plainly enough."

"'Good old friend'!" the doctor would sometimes repeat to himself. And at this period he was a younger man than the major had been when he married his wife.

In about ten days from the time he left Atlanta, Roger Dunworth returned to his home, much to the relief of Messrs. Parchester, Skitt, and Cruppledean, who were beginning to be a good deal discouraged by the apparently indefinite absence of their chief. Roger came home because that was the right thing for him to do, and because there was no longer any reason why he should stay away. He had left his home before because it was absolutely impossible for him to remain in a place where he could see the woman, his love for whom had grown into an all-

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absorbing and overpowering passion, actually loving another man, and that man Surrey.

But now he knew that there was nothing of the kind between Surrey and Ardis. There was nothing between Ardis and himself. His place in life was now upon his farm with his crops, his cattle, and his horses; his Parchesters, his Skitts, and his Cruppledeans. And to these he went.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ONE morning, after a cold night in which the roadway had been frozen into ridges and lumps, Dr. Lester walked over from Bald Hill to his house to get a book which he wanted, and to see if anything had happened to his belongings. Instead of finding the place quiet and deserted, as he expected, he was surprised to see smoke curling from the chimney, and as he approached nearer to hear some one moving within.

He hastened to the door, which he found locked as he had left it, and when he had somewhat nervously thrust in his key and opened it, he beheld within his friend Bonetti comfortably seated in an arm-chair before a fire with another chair by his side.

The philosophizer arose and extended his hand. "How d'ye do, doctor?" he said. "I'm right glad to see you back again. I heard you'd got home, but I couldn't get up here to see you; the walkin' was too powerful sticky."

"How did you get in?" asked the doctor.

"Easy enough," said Bonetti. "I knew that back window wasn't fastened, for it never is; at least the fastenings don't amount to anything. Then, as I reckoned you'd be back before long, I just made up a fire and waited. I saw you comin' and I put this chair here for you. Sit down and warm yourself."

The doctor did not look very well satisfied at having his home invaded in this way. "You might have waited a long time, Bonnet," he said. "I am now staying at Bald Hill, and merely happened to come here this morn-

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ing. I am going back presently, before the road begins to thaw."

"But sit down first," said Bonetti, "and tell me what has happened. I'm just ranklin' to know how things have turned out. What I've heard I don't understand. Miss Ardis has come home and gone away again, and Roger Dunworth, I hear, hasn't come at all. What's the meanin' of that?"

The doctor did not sit down, but stood gazing at his companion with an unusual severity of expression. "Bonnet," said he, "there is one thing I should like to ask you. In what way did that young Englishman, Prouter, come to know that Miss Claverden was at Atlanta? There was no reason why those two men should have supposed that she was in that city if they had not been told of it, and told, too, of the very hotel at which she and the rest of the party intended to stop. Now, Bonnet, as far as I know, nobody in this part of the country but you knew our address. We were very careful to keep it private."

"Which was right, perfectly right," said Bonetti, leaning forward and extending his hands toward the fire, "but you can be certain of one thing: I didn't tell them she was there. I never saw Surrey at all, and didn't know he went down there. What the mischief did he go down there for? Has he been making more trouble? I wish I had broken his neck."

"Instead of that, I am afraid, Bonnet, that you have broken your word. I presume from what you say that you did know Prouter was going down there; and, consequently, that you told him where to go."

"Now, look here, doctor," said Bonetti, "you are getting rather hard upon a man. I say, as I did before, that I never told anybody where Miss Ardis was. If I said anything to Prouter about Atlanta, it was merely a matter

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of business. He wanted to see Mr. Dunworth on a matter of buyin' and sellin', and it was necessary he should know where he was; so if I said anything to him on that subject it was out-an'-out a matter of business, and had nothing to do with Miss Ardis, or Surrey either."

"Bonnet," said the doctor, speaking more sternly than the other had ever heard him speak, "you knew that Miss Ardis was going to Roger Dunworth, and that wherever he was she was; and you deliberately broke your word to me, and told Prouter. I suppose he told Surrey, for they came down together, and there has been great trouble, and a duel has been fought, and the engagement between Roger Dunworth and Ardis Claverden has been broken off finally. And you are at the bottom of it all! All the grief, the desolation, the misery which has fallen upon the Claverden family and upon Roger Dunworth has been caused by you!"

"A duel!" exclaimed Bonetti. "That, I reckon, was between Dunworth and Surrey. I hope Surrey was killed!"

"He was not," the doctor said angrily. "And is that all you have to say about the consequences of your unpardonable treachery?"

"It appears to me," said Bonetti, "that you are allowin' yourself to get right sharp riled. I didn't make anybody fight a duel."

"You are the cause of every evil thing that happened," said the doctor. "If it had not been for you those men would not have gone down there, and at this moment Ardis Claverden would have been a happy betrothed woman in her father's house. Instead of that, misery, misery, misery!"

"Upon my word," said Bonetti, "this is a little bit too much for me to tackle! Feelin' as you once did in that direction—and with you when that sort of thing comes

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once it stays always—I don't see why you trouble yourself so much that that match is broken off! Even if you can't get a girl yourself, it's a comfort to know no one else has got her."

"Bonnet!" cried the doctor, "now you have twice broken your word to me, for you vowed you would never mention that subject again. At the bottom of every feeling that I have or ever had toward Ardis Claverden is the strongest desire for her happiness; and all that I have done has been done hoping to make her happy. A marriage with Roger Dunworth was the only thing in the world which could have made her truly happy, and this would have been brought about but for your infernal treachery. Bonnet, from this moment you are no friend of mine!"

And with flashing eyes the doctor stepped to a shelf to get the book he had come for.

"Doctor," said Bonetti, turning toward him, "never in my life did I see you in such a temper! And it appears to me you are not showing good judgment. Now, a friend with some sense in him that you can tackle to or have him tackle to you whenever there's need for it is not to be got every day. And if he runs a little short in this thing or that thing, that doesn't prove that he hasn't got a pretty good stock on hand of what you'd be likely to want some time or other, if not just this minute. So it's my advice to you to think over that matter a little. A friend's a friend, and a man ought to be mighty careful about lettin' 'em slide. If you were to stick to that notion it would be as hard on me as it would be on you. Why, one of the things I came up here to-day to speak to you about was to ask you what you had done with your horse. You might as well have let me have the use of him all the time you were away, and, for that matter, now; for if

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you are stayin' at Bald Hill you'll not be likely to need him. There's plenty of horses there."

To these words Dr. Lester had, apparently, paid no attention, but had busied himself in boring a hole in the lower sash of his back window, into which he had driven a screw so that the window could not be opened from the outside. When he had finished this job he turned to Bonetti and said: "I am now going back to Bald Hill, and shall shut up this house."

And stepping to the fire, he pushed together the burnt remains of the small sticks of which it had been made, and covered them with ashes. Bonetti silently watched these movements of the doctor, and when he went to the door he followed him. The two stepped out, and the door was locked behind them.

The doctor strode away toward Bald Hill as rapidly as the condition of the roads would allow; and as Bonetti's way home was in the same direction, he followed. But the doctor's long legs carried him on at a rate which it was almost impossible for Bonetti to maintain; and although several times he tried to speak to the doctor, he was obliged to fall back before he could finish his remark. Dr. Lester paid no attention whatever to his companion; and when he reached a spot where he could make an advantageous short cut over a long, sloping, pasture field, he climbed the roadside fence and made his way across the field.

Bonetti for a moment hesitated, for this *détour* would take him out of his way, but he wished very much to speak to the doctor, and so climbed the fence and followed him. The surface of the half-dead turf was rather rough, but it made better footway than the road, and Bonetti was able to break into a little trot, and thus to overtake the doctor.

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"Look here," said he, running by the side of the other, "this sort of thing ain't goin' to pay. I don't say anything about what has riled you. A man has got a right to be riled if he wants to be, and very often it does him good. If you want to blaze out against me for what you say I have done, blaze away! I don't mind. You've got a right to do it, and I won't hinder. But this cuttin' loose altogether is a different kind of thing. It won't do for you, and it won't do for me. If you would just reason on that point you'd see it for yourself. What's done is done, and the right thing to do now is to begin all over again. If you can get any good out of me, and I can get any good out of you, all we get is clear gain. And what's the sense in throwin' it away? To cut loose like this don't stand to reason and it isn't Christian. It's a settin' a bad example to the whole neighborhood."

At this point the doctor climbed another fence, and kept on his way without making any answer to Bonetti's appeals. The latter still followed, speaking whenever he got a chance until they had really reached the Bald Hill house, when the two separated, Bonetti going round to the back, and the doctor keeping on to the front door.

Bonetti was very much cast down. Few things could be so injurious to his happiness and his general well-being as a breach with Dr. Lester. To this fellow-philosophizer he had been in the habit, for years, of going, not very much for advice, but for all manner of assistance and comfort. And although he did not always get what he asked for, the average result was very favorable.

"I reckon," said Bonetti, as with his hands in his pockets he walked round the back of the house toward the barns, "that I'd about as lief lose my back teeth as split with the doctor. Confound that black-hearted scoundrel Surrey! He's always makin' trouble between

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friends. I wish I had thrown him into the bottomless pit of the Ridgeby Caves! How d'ye, Uncle Shad? You don't find much to do in these days, do you? The winter seems to hang on."

"Not much to do!" said the old negro, letting his axe rest on the log he was cutting. "Why, Mistah Bonnet, dar's on'y free times in de whole cohse ob de yeah dat dere ain't no wuck to do; an' dem's eatin' time, sleepin' time, an' chu'ch time."

Bonetti shrugged his shoulders. "It ain't church time now, Uncle Shad, and you needn't preach. So your Miss Ardis has gone off again, has she?"

"Yaas, sah," said the old man. "She's done gone off, an' it 'pears like to we all as if nobody lived at Bald Hill."

"There's no sense in that!" said Bonetti. "The major is here, all the same, and Miss Ardis is in the habit of goin' away every winter."

"Dat's so, Mistah Bonnet," said Uncle Shad, "but dis time is pow'ful dif'rent from any udder time. Eb'ry udder time she say she go on one day, an' she say she come back on anudder day, an' on dat udder day back she come, shuh as clock strikin'. But now I reckon she nebber come back no mo'. We all 'spected a weddin' heah, wid Mistah Dunworf, but dat's done smash up. We's come to de 'clusion dat Miss Ardis'll mahry some gemman up norf, an' send for de major to come lib wid her."

"Humph!" said Bonetti. "You colored people do too much thinkin'. It injures your brains, and you ought to stop it."

"Don' know 'bout dat," said Uncle Shad reflectively. "Mos' ob our brains hab got purty hard shells, an' dey ain't likely to split wid de thinkin' we all got to do. An' you know, Mistah Bonnet, we all's 'bliged to think 'bout gittin' mahr'ed."

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"Obliged!" said Bonetti with a sneer. "It would be better for you and everybody else if you would let that sort of thing alone, and stick to your work."

"Bress your soul, Mistah Bonnet," said Uncle Shad, "I reckon dat ef de white folks listen to what we all say dey'd sometimes do better. Now, dar's Miss Bonnet. If she listened to we all she'd gone an' mahr'ed some kind o' man who'd split wood fer her, an' tote it too when de snow's on de groun', an' gib her meat more'n two or free times a week an' send her da'ters to school when dey was growed up enough. But thinkin' ain't no good now, an' she's got to go 'long an' do her own pickin' an' scratchin'."

"And you'd better go along and cut your wood," said Bonetti, "instead of standin' there and talkin' like a mush-head."

"Dat's so," said Uncle Shad. And with a broad grin he whanged his axe into the log.

Bonetti walked away with his hands in his pockets. "This ought to have been the first of April," he muttered, "for it is certainly Fools' Day!"

Then he passed by the farm buildings and servants' houses, went down the hill, and made his way across the fields to his home.

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CHAPTER XXXIX.

IT was quite natural that the Chiverleys should have been disappointed at being obliged to give up their proposed sketching tour in the South. But it was quite as natural, considering that they were the Chiverleys, that, once again established in their loved studio, they should say to each other a dozen times a day how much better it was at this season of the year to be at home and at work than to be wandering about in the South making sketches.

They had made many studies of Southern scenery, and while Mrs. Chiverley set herself to work to finish the little picture on which she had been engaged at the time of their sudden departure from home, her husband got out a large, new canvas, and with hearty enthusiasm began a picture portraying the scenery of Northern Georgia as it had never been portrayed before.

Ardis, too, set up her easel. She had brought her painting outfit with her, and proposed going earnestly to work, with Mr. Chiverley as instructor in color and manipulation. There was nothing drooping or stricken in the appearance of this young lady. She had deliberately resolved that her life was not to be overshadowed by what had happened, and whenever there was an opportunity to step into warmth and brightness she took that step. She was not trying to appear to others that she was unstricken; she was resolutely convincing herself that this thing being over she was the same brave, independent, earnest woman that she had been before.

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Mrs. Chiverley could not entirely sympathize with this state of mind. A great affliction—and she knew Ardis had been greatly afflicted—called for a certain amount of consequent sobriety. One might dance, but it must not be jigs. Now, Ardis liked jigs.

"My dear child," she said to Mrs. Chiverley, "why shouldn't I take part in the tableaux of the homeopathic patronesses? Nobody has died and we are not wearing mourning."

And in the tableaux she took part.

"There is something under all this," thought Mrs. Chiverley. But, whatever was under, that which was above was most charming and captivating to man, woman, and child.

Easter came early this year, and in the revival of social festivities Ardis was quite willing to take an animated part. Her aunt was now in New York and anxious to witness the triumph of her niece in fashionable life; and although Ardis would not leave the Chiverleys for her aunt's hotel, she went with that lady to balls, receptions, germans, and private theatricals; and whenever she went her success was great. To her beauty and her bright intelligence was added a certain dash of manner, born of the independent spirit which lay at the base of her being which carried all before it, women as well as men. Her aunt was very proud and very hopeful.

"What she must do," she thought, "is to go with me to Europe. There are personages of high degree who come over here, but the better ones remain at home."

On a certain gay occasion Ardis met with Mr. Egbert Dalrymple. The moment this young man's eyes fell upon her he stalked across the room toward her. Ardis was earnestly engaged in conversation with a gentleman, but Dalrymple drew up a chair, and injected so much of his

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emotional being into a few opening remarks that the other man departed as if he had been the intruder.

This young man now appeared more interesting to Ardis than he had been in Virginia. There he was a bore; here his oddities threw him into an amusing relief. As for Dalrymple himself, he glowed. When not actually with Ardis he was near her; his large eyes ever on her. In the course of the evening she waltzed with him, and when that dance was over, and he had been assured that he had no chance for another, the young man abruptly left the house and telegraphed to his sister:

"No longer in the outer courts of Heaven, but in its inmost shining halls."

"He has met that Claverden girl and of course he is on his knees before her!" said Miss Dalrymple, the next morning, as she threw the telegram into the fire. "Heaven, indeed! He will find it quite the opposite!"

The Chiverleys talked a great deal about Ardis. "It is not correct, my dear," said Mr. Chiverley one morning, leaning back in his chair to fix a critical gaze upon a combination of color which he was working into the trunk of a tree, "to say that her memory must linger. In my experience of life, stretching over a period not necessary to recall, I have found that memories don't linger. We pass through stages of action and feeling, and we begin again. Ardis will begin again."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself to talk in that way," said his wife. "How many stages did you pass through, I should like to know, before you entered your present one? And how many more do you expect to enter, should you get through with this?"

"By 'this' I suppose you mean our wedded life," said Mr. Chiverley, putting in some touches of gray to simulate moss, "which is, as you ought to know, one all-absorbing

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stage. It began when our affections first came of age, and will continue until there is nothing left of them. This is very different from that. That is broken off, snapped short, done with. And at her age there is the certainty that she will begin again."

"What you say is pure assumption," said Mrs. Chiverley.

"You may think so, my dear," said Mr. Chiverley, "but if you would trust to the judgment of your only husband you would do well. What he says may appear improbable at the moment, but as time rolls on the correctness of his conclusions becomes so unmistakably obvious that you imagine you always thought that way yourself."

"I do nothing of the kind," said Mrs. Chiverley.

"But he never hesitates to seek the aid of a collateral intelligence, and therefore would be very much obliged to you, madam, if you would take a look at this tree and tell him if it resembles, in any way, those massive trunks we saw in Northern Georgia."

"Do you know what I would call that picture if I were you?" said Mrs. Chiverley, after she had gazed at it a few moments.

"I wish I did," said her husband, turning quickly toward her.

"I would call it: 'The Seven Ages of Trees.' There is the infant tree; and near by, the sapling school-boy with shining, morning face; and so they go on, including the fat justice over there, until they reach the second childishness of this aged trunk, inanely decorating itself with Virginia creeper."

"A capital idea!" exclaimed Mr. Chiverley, "capital! But we must not allow our fancies to interfere with earnest purpose. This is a scene on the Upper Mississippi."

Mrs. Chiverley sighed. Earnest purpose seemed to do so little toward selling pictures. At present the state of

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their "permanent gallery," as Mr. Chiverley sometimes called his studio, began to weigh upon the mind of his wife. There were periods, coming round in tolerably regular cycles, when her mind was a good deal weighed upon in this way.

The addition of Ardis to the studio family in no way increased the pressure on Mrs. Chiverley. In fact, it lightened it. On this second visit Ardis, as a sister artist, had insisted upon becoming one of the family and paying her share of the expenses; and she paid, besides, at regular rates, for the tuition received from Mr. Chiverley. But in order to make the financial affairs of the little party perfectly satisfactory, it was necessary that Mr. and Mrs. Chiverley should also pay their share of the expenses, and at this time there was reason for doubt in regard to the power of the worthy pair to accomplish this.

Where the picture bought by ex-Governor Upton had gone Mrs. Chiverley did not know, for it had arrived at Bald Hill securely boxed and addressed to Ardis, who, of course, had been very careful not to have it opened during the stay of the Chiverleys in that house; but where the money had gone which paid for the picture she knew very well. And, more than that, she knew that it was all gone.

Every day at twelve o'clock Mr. Chiverley promptly ceased from his labors, and went out to take a brisk walk until one, which was the luncheon hour. It happened during one of these absences that a middle-aged gentleman came into the studio. He came because he had recently discovered that this was a studio which he had never visited, and it would have lain hard upon his conscience to know of a studio in the city and to be ignorant of what was in it.

The effect produced upon this gentleman was very much like the effect produced upon other gentlemen who

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visited this studio. In many of the pictures there was something which at first sight was attractive, but a careful examination almost always revealed something else which was very disappointing. Thus the paintings were seldom condemned as a whole, but after a visitor had made the round of the room, it was quite the usual thing for him to go away without making any reference to a financial transaction.

Ardis and Mrs. Chiverley, each at their easels, occasionally glanced at this gentleman, who had accepted the invitation of the latter to look about for himself. Neither of them had any hope, but each had a feeble desire to see if he looked longer at one picture than at another. Presently he stopped before Mr. Chiverley's recently finished canvas. He stood there for some time, occasionally stepping a little back in order to get a better view, and then coming closer again. Presently he turned to Mrs. Chiverley.

"Madam," said he, "can you tell me where the scene of this picture is laid? It reminds me somewhat of the North and somewhat of the South, and I am not sure that it does not contain suggestions of the East and the West."

"Yes," thought Ardis at her easel, "and of the North-east, and the Sou'-sou'west, and all the other points of the compass."

Mrs. Chiverley left her seat and approached the visitor. She was a little piqued at his remark.

"Some pictures have a meaning," she said, "which is not apparent to every one at first sight."

"You are correct, madam," said the visitor.

"This painting, for instance," continued Mrs. Chiverley, "represents the seven ages of trees." And then, with as much readiness as Jacques detailed the seven ages

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of man to the duke, she pointed out in the trees of the picture the counterparts of these ages.

"Madam," said the visitor, "you delight me. I admit that I utterly failed to see the point of this picture; but now that I am aware of its meaning I understand its apparent incongruities. Meaning despises locality."

"You are right," said Mrs. Chiverley earnestly. "Meaning is above everything."

"Madam," said the gentleman, his eyes still fixed upon the canvas, "as a student of Shakespeare, as well as a collector, in a small way, of works of art, I desire to have this picture, provided its price is not beyond my means."

Mrs. Chiverley gazed at him in an uncertain way. She did not seem to take in the import of his remark.

From her easel Ardis now named the price which Mr. Chiverley had fixed upon for the picture. He never finished a painting without stating very emphatically what he intended to ask for it.

"That is reasonable," said the gentleman, "and you may consider the picture mine." And he handed Mrs. Chiverley his card. Then, imbued with a new interest in the studio, he walked about looking at others of the pictures.

"This little study," said he, "seems to me as if it ought to have a significance, but I declare I am again at fault."

"Yes," said Mrs. Chiverley, "it ought to have a significance. In fact there is a significance connected with it. I could easily tell you what it is, but if you were afterward to look at the picture you would see no such meaning in it."

"Perhaps this is one of your husband's earlier works," said the gentleman, "in which he was not able to express his inspirations."

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"It is not one of my husband's works," said Mrs. Chiverley; "it is mine."

The visitor now glanced at the clock, which was ticking away more cheerfully than it had ticked for a long time, and said that he must go, but that he would come again to-morrow and look at more of the paintings; and probably would bring a friend with him.

"The best time to come," said Ardis, speaking quickly, "is between twelve and one. At that hour there is the best light on the pictures in this studio."

The moment that the gentleman had departed Ardis flew to Mrs. Chiverley and threw her arms round her neck. "Now, my dearest," she exclaimed, "you know your vocation in life. You must put meanings to Mr. Chiverley's pictures."

When the head of the house returned he was, of course, delighted to find that his painting had been sold.

"That is the way with us!" he cried. "We have spasms of prosperity. One of our works is bought, and up we go. Let us so live that while we are up we shall not remember that we have ever been down. And now, my dear, if you will give me the card of that exceptional appreciator of high art, I will write his bill and receipt instantly, so that if he should again happen to come while I am out there may be nothing in the way of an immediate settlement."

Mrs. Chiverley stood by him as he sat at the desk. "You must call the picture," she said, "'The Seven Ages of Trees.'"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Chiverley, turning suddenly and gazing with astonishment at his wife. "That will do for a bit of pleasantry, but the title of the picture is 'A Scene on the Upper Mississippi.' You don't want to deceive the man, do you?"

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"No, I do not," said Mrs. Chiverley, "and that is one reason why I did not give it your title. It is a capitally painted picture, and as a woodland 'Seven Ages' it is simply perfect. That was what it was sold for; and for that, and nothing else, will the money be paid."

Mr. Chiverley looked at her for a moment longer, and then bursting into a laugh he returned to his desk. "You have touched me to the quick," he said. "Money has given title before, and it shall do it now. There is the receipted bill!" he cried, pushing back his chair. "And now I shall run down and get something of the pop variety to add to our luncheon. We ought to have an uncommonly good meal to celebrate this happy anniversary. But," he said, stopping for a moment, "perhaps it has not been a year since we sold a picture."

"Go along," said Mrs. Chiverley with a laugh, "and let the pop be ginger beer."

The impetuous, affectionate, and earnest admonition of Ardis went straight to the heart of Mrs. Chiverley.

"Yes, that is what I will do," she said, when the two were alone. "I will give meanings to Mr. Chiverley's pictures. They have everything but that, and if I can give them what they lack I am sure I ought to do it. For instance," she continued, "look at that! Mr. Chiverley calls it a study of two women. But who in the world will care for it if it is looked upon simply as that? They are well painted, but they are not particularly interesting women. Now, I shall call it: 'The one shall be taken and the other left;' and don't you see an interest immediately begins to grow up about it? The mind of the observer is set to work. How shall one of them be taken? By death, by captor, or by bridegroom? And which one shall be taken? And why? These will be very interesting points. People can decide as they please. And each one

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who looks at it will infuse a different subtlety into the picture."

The next day, at the hour at which he had been told that there was the best light on the pictures, the purchaser of "The Seven Ages" came again, bringing with him two friends. The three went around the studio with Mrs. Chiverley, and looked at the pictures with her eyes.

"I did not suppose," said the visitor of the day before, turning to his friends, "that we had among us an artist so capable of locking up in an apparently ordinary exterior such lesson, such purports, such artistic admixture of the simple fact and the basic idea, and it is the unobtrusiveness of the idea which gives the work its greatest value."

"That is true," said one of the others. "It is a bore to have motives thrust upon your attention. Pictures with those protuberant significations annoy me."

"Precisely," said the third gentleman, "and although true art should always have a meaning, it should allow us to discover that meaning for ourselves. To evoke mental action in the beholder is one of the noblest objects of art."

The "Seven Ages" was paid for, and two small pictures which had been the subjects of remark by Mrs. Chiverley were bought.

And from this day the prosperity of the Chiverleys began. They never grew rich, nor did the name of the painter ever become truly famous; but for people who liked brains in a picture the studio became a resort, and the sale of a painting ceased to be an unusual event.

Mrs. Chiverley made some attempt to get her husband to work a meaning into his pictures while he was painting them, but in this she did not succeed. When they were finished they always appeared to her to mean something entirely different from what had been originally proposed; and she was forced to admit to herself that it would be

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better to let him go on in his own way, and for her to work in the purports after he had done his part. It was, indeed, as she had discovered in her own work, a very difficult thing to work up a picture to a fixed significance. It was ever so much easier to adapt the significance to the picture.

Mr. Chiverley soon learned that it was wise to allow his wife to have her own way in this matter, but now and then he rebelled. When she had worked out the meaning of a painting she would explain it to him, for it was not to be expected that his work would always be sold in his absence.

"Confound it, madam!" he exclaimed on one of these occasions. "That is a painting of the salt mines of Thurgis; and you call it 'The Patriarch's Last Breakfast!' It seems to me that is going a little too far."

"Not a bit of it!" replied Mrs. Chiverley. "We only see the entrance of the mines, anyway, and that will do as well for one kind of hole as another. And who will care for the salt mines of Thurgis? As for that old man, sitting on a rock eating his simple meal, he doesn't look in the least like a worker in the mines; he is too aged and he is too well-dressed. His pouch and his staff show him to be a traveller. He has stopped here to eat his morning meal; and he little dreams that those two figures in the middle distance, standing by the notch in the rocks through which he must pass, are waiting to murder and to rob him. The knowledge of this in the beholder of the picture gives an intensity of interest to that simple meal."

"I should say so!" cried Mr. Chiverley. "It is horrid! I never painted such a blood-chilling subject in my life. Those men are peaceful operatives coming to their work. No, madam, that is not his last breakfast. I will not stand it!"

"Very well, then," said Mrs. Chiverley. "Let us call it

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'The Wheel of Time.' That dark opening is really the entrance to the mines, or work-a-day life. That old man has finished his labors. He comes out; he is no longer fit for work; he sits down; he takes his ease. Yonder are younger men coming to take his place. And so it goes on forever. The wheel of time revolves."

"It will not do," said Mr. Chiverley; "too gloomy. It will make me think of myself hobbling out of this studio and sitting on the curbstone eating a crust of bread."

Mrs. Chiverley earnestly regarded the picture for a few moments. "If that does not suit you," she said, "suppose we call it 'Dawn at Eve.' Those figures are the old man's sons. He has been wandering over the world looking for them. He considers himself near the end of his days; and close by is that yawning chasm which symbolizes to him the grave of hope. But in a few moments his sons will reach him; new life will dawn upon him—dawn at eve! That title will suit the picture very well because there is a tinge of sunset to the right, while on the other side there is a decided early-morning sky."

"Very good," said Mr. Chiverley. "Let the salt mines of Thurgis dawn! But I must beg of you, my dear, that you will try to be on hand when the subject of this picture is explained. I am afraid I might get things mixed and call it 'The Evening Breakfast,' or 'The Salt of Hope.'"

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CHAPTER XL.

NOT very long after Mr. Egbert Dalrymple had waltzed with Ardis and telegraphed to his sister, he called at the studio. He did not come to buy pictures; he ignored pictures. It would have been difficult for an ordinary observer to decide from his conduct what he had come for. After a nod to Mrs. Chiverley—her husband was not at home—and a silent hand-shake with Ardis, who was at work at her easel, he walked up and down the room, his eyes fixed upon what Mrs. Chiverley afterward called "the middle future." He disregarded invitations to take a seat, and when Mrs. Chiverley, thinking it her duty as mistress of the house, to endeavor to interest every visitor, asked him what he thought of Mr. Chiverley's last picture, he stopped for a moment, turned his eyes toward her, and in a low and hollow tone inquired: "Is he then dead?"

This remark, notwithstanding its lugubrious nature, made both the ladies laugh; and Mrs. Chiverley apologized for her incorrect expression. Mr. Dalrymple made no further remark, but continued his solemn perambulations, ever and anon glancing at Mrs. Chiverley as if he wished that she had painted her last picture years upon years agone. This good lady knew very well what was the matter with him; and at last she felt she could no longer endure his striding and his gazing.

Jumping up, she went over to Ardis and whispered to her: "Shall I go out?"

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Ardis nodded, and putting on her hat, Mrs. Chiverley went out.

The sound of her steps on the stairs had not died away when Egbert Dalrymple approached Ardis and sank upon his knees beside her easel. His feet were close together with the toes turned up beneath them, and he sat well back upon his heels. His hands were clasped before him; his body was erect; and his yearning countenance was raised toward Ardis.

Her first impulse was to give him a dab of red paint on his nose from the brush she held in her hand, for it was difficult to take Egbert Dalrymple seriously. But this impulse, of course, was but momentary.

"I need not speak," he murmured. "You know my soul. Your soul. It is yours, as I am. Mind, soul, heart, body. I am yours. Only that—yours."

"If you were really mine," said Ardis, "the first thing I should tell you to do would be to get up; for if Mr. and Mrs. Chiverley come back and find you in that mediæval position they will be sure to go instantly to work and sketch you."

"Here is my place," he said. "At your feet always, through the forever. I am yours; only yours; else I exist not."

"Mr. Dalrymple," said Ardis, "I thought you wanted to say something like this, and I am very glad you have had the opportunity, because, for my part, I wish to say that I absolutely and positively decline to accept you as mine. It will be of no use at all for you to allude to this subject again. And so please get up."

The young man did not move from his position. "Your words make no difference," he said. "I am yours, that is all I am. Tell the air you will not breathe it; tell me I am not yours; it is one."

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By a most remarkable concatenation of circumstances it happened that at that moment it was just one o'clock, and as the clock asserted this fact in a clear, distinct tone, Mr. Chiverley, with his accustomed loyalty to luncheon time, opened the door.

At the first sound of his coming Egbert Dalrymple rose to his feet and turned a lowering countenance upon the in-comer. Mr. Chiverley looked surprised when he saw him, but instantly approached with cordial salutation.

Dalrymple, however, took no notice of his outstretched hand, but standing for a moment with his eyes fixed upon the floor, he ejaculated "So!" and without the least pretense of leave-taking, he strode away. Mr. Chiverley burst out laughing, and Ardis could not help joining him. "What was it doing?" he asked.

"Proposing and getting declined," said Ardis.

"I don't mind luncheon being delayed," said Mrs. Chiverley, who came in presently, "if Ardis is sure that she has given that stalking glare his quietus."

"I have done my best," said Ardis, "but I am by no means certain that I have succeeded."

Her doubts were well founded, for in two days a long letter arrived from Mr. Dalrymple, in which he stated that as it was impossible to be exempt from inane intrusion in the place where Miss Claverden was now staying, he was forced to picture his soul on paper. And this he did to the extent of eight pages. But in all his picturing appeared no allusion whatever to what Ardis had said to him. It was his custom to ignore that which was distasteful.

Ardis returned his letter, after reading a page or two of it, and briefly wrote that as he and his family were her neighbors at her native place, she wished always to remain on good terms with them; but any connection stronger

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than that of friendly neighbors was simply impossible, and she requested him to write her no more letters, and never again to return to the subject which he had broached at the studio.

In a few days more she received another letter, which she sent back unopened; and it was not long after this that Mr. Dalrymple called upon her. Fortunately she was not at home.

"It will be absolutely necessary to have him shot," said Mr. Chiverley, afterward. "This sort of persecution will not do at all."

"You need not trouble yourself to shoot him," said Ardis. "I shall not open his letters, and if he presents himself again to me, I can effectually dispose of him. Now that I know what he really is, I shall show him what I can be."

Spring advanced; the weather became more and more delightful; the festivities of society gradually disappeared, the people in the rural districts began to advertise admirable country residences eight minutes' walk from the railroad station; and Major Claverden wrote from Bald Hill that in that part of the world the joyful season called by him the Ardis-time had come.

So Ardis, reversing the action of the migratory birds, prepared to fly southward, to where the cool breezes from the Blue Ridge blew all summer over the hills and through the valleys of her native county.

The Chiverleys, of course, bewailed her going, but as they were to visit Bald Hill in the summer, they bore up bravely. Her aunt showed that she had been greatly disappointed in the result of Ardis' stay in New York.

"It was all on account of your living in that studio," she said. "If you had been here with me I believe you would have had half a dozen proposals during the past season; but of course nobody was going to call on you there."

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Ardis laughed. "We had visits," she said, "from a great many pleasant people. And more than that, I received in that studio a proposal of marriage."

"From whom?" asked her aunt, quickly.

"From a gentleman who lives in the Bald Hill neighborhood but has spent part of the winter in this city."

"Humph!" said her aunt. "You can get plenty of that kind without coming here and going into society. Of course you rejected him?"

"Oh, yes," said Ardis.

"Next winter," said her aunt, "you must positively come and stay with me, and if you want to study painting you can go to your studio in the mornings. Then we shall see what we shall see."

"Yes," said Ardis, "that is what we shall see."

If the rising of the sun; if the birds and flowers of spring; if the glories of the summer; if the full fruition of the vines and the golden wealth of the fields had all come in one day to Major Claverden, they would have been paled, overshadowed, and rendered unnoticeable by the coming of his daughter. And no bird nor flower, sun nor season, was gayer or more beautiful or brighter than was Ardis.

"She has got over it! entirely over it! It is easy to see that!" said the major to Dr. Lester as, late on the evening of his daughter's arrival, they sat in the library with their pipes.

"Yes," said the doctor, "I think she has."

Dr. Lester's mental being was in a tremble. Ten times a minute, when he trembled the most, did he tell himself that there was no earthly reason nor justification for any feeling of this kind. But still his mental being continued to tremble.

"Of course I am glad," the major went on to say, "very

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glad to see that my child has passed through this terrible ordeal without scar or scorch; but I cannot help feeling a little disappointment at the same time. If there had been the least sign in her manner that she remembered what had been, I should have felt a slight encouragement. But she asked about Roger Dunworth precisely as she would have inquired about one of those young Englishmen he is teaching to be farmers."

"Yes, I noticed that," said the doctor.

"I did not believe," said the major, "that I could allow myself to drop into such a doleful train of thought on this happy day. But it is no wonder my spirits should be downcast when I consider that, leaving out Roger, there is not one man in the whole circle of my acquaintance to whom I would wish to give my daughter's hand."

The doctor sighed and nodded. For some moments the two sat in silence. Then said the major:

"Is your pipe out?"

"Yes," replied the doctor.

"Then suppose we go to bed," remarked his host.

Life at Bald Hill now went on very much as it had gone in the past summer. Ardis painted, rode, and visited. People came and went. And the country grew beautiful, as it knew well how to grow.

Roger Dunworth did not come to Bald Hill. He intended to do so, but he would wait awhile. He knew exactly how Ardis would receive him when he came. She would be to him the same kindly, charming hostess that she was to everybody. In her demeanor there would be nothing to suggest the past. For himself he knew that his first meeting with her would be a heart-breaking plunge. He would have to take it; but not yet.

A very faithful visitor to Bald Hill was Tom Prouter. This enterprising young man, having disposed of his milk

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business in a fragmentary manner—that is to say, by selling some of the cows to Mr. Dunworth, some to a butcher, the only good horse to Miss Airpenny, and the wagons and utensils to anybody who would take them at any price—had, with all the enthusiastic earnestness of his nature, taken up the life of a vine grower. He had found a man who was desirous of laying down such a life, and had bought of him a vineyard well planted but not yet in bearing, in the midst of which stood a little house of four rooms.

Prouter was charmed to find everything thus ready to his hand. There was a living room—parlor, library, study, or whatever one might choose to call it—in which he could have his meals and enjoy himself after his labors. Back of this room was a little kitchen, and above were two chambers, one for himself and one for a friend. His servants—as many as he might need—could sleep in their own cabins.

He now launched himself boisterously into his new career. He began by having the little house painted, inside and out, and spared no money in furnishing it handsomely and comfortably; he put up a barn and other outbuildings, which somewhat dwarfed the house; and even planned for the planting of a grove of trees and wooded avenue leading down to the main road. But having reflected that tall trees would shade his vines, he gave up this scheme.

"This is a business," he said to Miss Airpenny, who had ridden over to look at his place, "into which a man can put all the energy of his nature. Now, you couldn't put all the energy of your nature into milk, could you?"

"No, I couldn't," said Miss Airpenny. "It's not a bad little house. What will you sell it for?"

"Sell it!" cried Tom Prouter, his face flushing its red-

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dest. "Do you suppose I would sell it? You might as well ask a man to sell his wife or his children as to sell his home to which he intends to devote the thoughts and labors of his life, and where he expects to peacefully end his days! A home is a home, and not a thing for bargain and sale!"

"Really!" remarked Miss Airpenny. "And now let me see what sort of barn you have built."

As soon as the frost was out of the ground Tom Prouter arose at daybreak, and worked with his own hands in his vineyard. This continued for about a week, and then he found it would be better economy to employ some laborers and give most of his time to overseeing them.

All now went on very well until Miss Ardis Claverden returned to Bald Hill; and then Tom Prouter suddenly remembered that his bachelor establishment might place him in a false light. Without sufficient reflection he had made everything look too permanent. He very much objected to being looked upon as a permanent bachelor, and he bitterly told himself that he ought to have thought of that before. He desired a reputation for energy and industry, but it must be that sort of energy and industry which belonged to the head of a family.

However, if he had made a mistake he must do his best to correct it. On his first visit to Miss Claverden—and this was the day after she arrived—he made it very plain to her that his present place of residence and endeavor was nothing more than a training school. Of course such a house as he had would not do at all for a life-long home, such as he proposed to establish, but it very well answered his purpose while he was fitting himself for the management of an estate in this part of the country.

"It's a great deal better, you know," said he, "to be well grounded in that sort of thing—vines, land, stock,

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and such like—before you go into it on a big scale, with a house with a lot of rooms in it, and all that. Isn't it now, Miss Claverden?"

"Oh, yes," answered the lady. "I think your plan is a very good one. Many men, now rich, have begun life, and even brought up families in houses no larger than yours."

"By George!" said Prouter to himself as he got into his dog-cart to drive away, "that's a royal girl! I really believe that if she out-and-out loved a man she would be willing to go with him and live in a house no bigger than mine! And mine isn't a bad house, either! If I build on one side of it a drawing-room and a dining-room, and a library with a bay-window in it, and some good-sized bedrooms up-stairs, and perhaps a third story for boxes, servants, and that sort of thing, it would be no end of a good house. And then I should certainly plant the grove and the avenue of trees, even if they did shade a few vines. But don't you hurry, Tom, my boy. Be careful about mistakes. Steady is the word!"

Steady was truly the word most applicable to Tom Prouter's visits to Bald Hill. Nearly every day found him there. There was never any lack of excuse for going, if excuse were needed. His interest in vine-growing urged him to frequent counsel with Major Claverden, who was always glad to talk with anybody upon this great subject.

This year the old gentleman was a little despondent, for the wine of Bald Hill seemed slipping away into the very distant future. The vines which he had expected to yield this year the much-desired juice were in a bad condition, and would probably have to be grubbed up, the fate which so many of his experimental vines had already met. Grubbing up was easy enough, but the time required for

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the new vines to reach their period of rich maturity discouraged the major. He had almost determined not to make any more plantings.

Prouter was full of hope. He was eager to plant all sorts of things. It was his planting-time of life, and his cheery enthusiasm had a good effect upon the major, who was always glad to see him.

After each of these conferences Prouter was sure to make a stop at the studio, or the house, or under some spreading tree on the lawn, or in whatever other place he might be able to find Miss Claverden. There his tongue would wag, his face flush, and his eyes sparkle for as long a time as he deemed proper for a man who had declared "steady" to be the word. He did not wish the lady to think that he was an idle fellow with plenty of time on his hands. Such men were not well thought of in that community; and he seldom took leave without making some reference to the necessity of hurrying home to attend to his affairs.

One morning Mr. Prouter, on inquiring for Miss Claverden, was informed by a servant that she was in the library. He proceeded toward this familiar room, but before he reached the door he discovered—what the maid had not told him—that the lady was not alone.

Prouter instinctively stopped. He did not wish to intrude upon Miss Claverden, but he also greatly objected to going away without seeing her. He was not a man who listened by partly-opened doors, but still, if the person inside should be Dr. Lester or any other intimate friend of the family, he would not hesitate to go into the room. It was a gentleman's voice he heard, but he did not recognize it; and he was on the point of turning away when his attention was arrested by the high tones of Miss Claverden's reply:

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"Mr. Dalrymple," she said, "I told you never again to mention that subject to me. Since you pay no regard whatever to my wishes I am forced to ask you to leave me. And unless you come as a friend of the family, and without any intention of offering yourself to me, I desire that you shall not visit this house again."

In almost any other instance the impropriety of listening any longer would have been very plain to Tom Prouter, but at this moment he was too much agitated to consider propriety. There was a man in that room who was insulting Ardis Claverden! He knew now who he was; an unspeakable ass. And she was ordering him out of the house. Perhaps she might need assistance!

Now Mr. Dalrymple spoke. "Demand," he said, speaking clearly and smoothly, "that I become a blond. Ask me to be of hoary age; corpulent—decrepit. I can be any of these as well as one who loves you not. Yours now; yours always. Words matter not; time changes me not. But, as you desire, I go now."

The stupendous effrontery of these remarks made the blood boil in the veins of Tom Prouter. His English heart of oak swelled and throbbed within him, and every one of his vigorous muscles seemed to grow tense and hard. Should he bound into the room and dash that man to the floor? Or should he spring upon him as he came out, rush him to the door, and hurl him over the railing of the porch?

But Miss Claverden now came out of the room, her face pale and her step quick; and behind her followed Egbert Dalrymple. Prouter sprang to her side.

"Shall I ki——" "Kill him," he was going to say, but changed it to "kick him down the steps?"

Ardis betrayed no surprise at Mr. Prouter's words, nor at his apparent knowledge of the situation. She was agi-

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tated and angry. "Let him alone!" she said. "It is only Mr. Dalrymple! He is going."

Prouter did not move, but his eyes flashed, his fists were clinched, and his sinewy form was all a-tingle for a spring. Egbert Dalrymple, as he walked deliberately out of the library and toward the hall door, glanced at the young Englishman with about as much fear and as much interest as if he had been a badly stuffed tiger in a furrier's window. Reaching the door he turned and bowed to Ardis; and then, drawing on his gloves as he went, he descended the steps and walked over the lawn.

It was a beautiful day, and, impelled by his youth and vigor and his love for the scent of foliage and herbage, he had come afoot across the fields. As he walked he stooped and picked a daisy. He looked at it a moment, raised it to his lips and kissed it; then he looked at it again.

"The same daisy," he murmured. After which he carefully put it into his buttonhole, and glancing downward at it murmured: "The same daisy! So! Always the same! Ever the same!"

Then with easy and with graceful tread he passed on over the soft grass, and through the shaded pathways of the woods, inhaling with expanded chest the fragrant air already touched with the warmth of coming summer.

As soon as Dalrymple had gone, Ardis walked out on the broad piazza at the back of the house, and Prouter accompanied her.

"You must excuse me, Miss Claverden," he said. "You may think I have been intruding, but they told me you were in the library; and when I reached the door I heard you speaking severely to that—thing, and I didn't know but——"

"Oh, don't mention him," said Ardis, taking a seat. "He has gone and there is an end of it! Isn't this a

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lovely day? If it hadn't been necessary to send my mare to be shod I should have been off for a gallop over the fields."

"Oh, that needn't stop you!" cried Prouter. "There's my horse at the front in the dog-cart. I can have him out of the shafts and your saddle on him in no time. He has never been ridden by a lady, but I wager he will go finely. And if I may ride with you, any mount will do for me."

"Thank you," said Ardis with a smile, "but I think we will postpone the ride. And now sit down and tell me how you get on with your meals. Yesterday you said that you had to cook your breakfast yourself."

It was a delightful change, she thought, after the scene she had just passed through, to sit and talk to an absolutely unromantic young man who could converse without adoring and whose mind ran upon horses and vines instead of souls and futures. The excitement which her anger had caused had not yet died away, and it showed itself in the brightened vivacity of her words and manner. To Prouter it was heavenly to talk on any subject to this sparkling angel.

"That is a fact," he said. "I did have to cook my own breakfast. The woman who has been coming in to do that sort of thing was such a beastly cook that I vowed, when I was eating my dinner the night before, that as soon as I had finished I would drive her out of the house; and the moment I had swallowed the last mouthful I got up and did it. I have another one now, though I fancy she is going to turn out worse than the last. But I have heard of a negro man down in the other end of the county who has been in the navy. Now, if you can get hold of a fellow who has been in the navy, he can almost always cook. And he can make himself useful to you in

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other ways, too. He can brush your trousers, black your boots, and do all that sort of thing."

"A perfect treasure such a man would be!" cried Ardis, laughing so heartily that Prouter joined in without in the least seeing any cause for hilarity.

"But I don't want you to think, Miss Claverden," he cried, "that I am intending always to get on in this slip-shod fashion. I am making plans in my mind for a regular corps of servants; and I don't know but I shall import them from England. They are thoroughly trained over there, you know—butlers, cooks, housemaids, footmen, even down to the stable-boys. Every rascal of them knows what he has to do, and goes and does it."

"But what use could you have for such a household, Mr. Prouter?" exclaimed Ardis. "You would be obliged to get lodgings for them in the neighborhood: your house would not hold them."

"Bless my soul, Miss Claverden!" said Prouter. "Do you suppose I intend always to live in a little house like that? I am making plans now to add to it; to build up a regular mansion."

"Your servants will need a very good-sized house," said Ardis. "And shall you continue to live in the little part of it?"

And thus the talk went merrily and earnestly on until Prouter declared that he should have been off long ago, and tore himself away. He went home, skipping over the grass and forgetting that he had come in a dog-cart. As he approached his vineyard the laborer on watch aroused the two others, who were comfortably napping in the sun, and the three went vigorously to work.

"Boys," cried Prouter, striding radiantly into their midst, "this is a glorious day, and I am going to give you a half-holiday! and here is fifty cents apiece for you.

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But hold up! Before you go, one of you must run over to Bald Hill and get my horse and dog-cart. I didn't come back by the road."

"Reckon he done sell dat little farm o' his'n," said one laborer to the other, as they gayly walked homeward. "Don't reckon dar's anything in dis whole worl' dat make him so pow'ful tickled as to sell his place."

"Ef he's done gone an' sol' it," said the other, "I reckon we all kin wuck at de nex' thing he buys, jus' de same!"

"Dat's so, shuh!" was the reply.

These men had been assistants in the milk business.

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CHAPTER XLI.

IN these early summer days this world was a very happy world to Tom Prouter. It had always presented to him a gladsome aspect, though sometimes flecked with spasmodic streaks of business or social perplexities, but now it glowed beneath him as though he walked upon the upper surface of a sun-gilded cloud.

He continued to make frequent visits to Bald Hill, but he was very wary and prudent about them. "Steady" was still the word. He thought he had been indiscreet in making mention of the house he intended to build and of the servants he would employ. The knowledge of that sort of thing ought to dawn upon a person gradually. If it were plumped down too suddenly it would appear to have a design in it.

Now, Prouter did not wish that Miss Claverden should imagine that he had any designs upon her. He had never been so cautious in his life. The present, strongest desire of his nature was to make a good impression upon the lady of Bald Hill. He endeavored to banish from his manner and deportment all signs of frivolity and fitfulness, and, consequently, he sometimes became a little dull; but as he never perceived this the world glowed no less brightly beneath him.

In order that the neighborhood might not come to too hasty conclusions in regard to the constant intercourse which he kept up with Bald Hill, he also made visits to others of his friends; but these never interfered with the

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regularity of his dropping in on the major and his daughter.

Sometimes he visited his old friends and countrymen, the Quantrills, and had some lively talks with Miss Airpenny, with whom he felt under no manner of restraint, and could be as frivolous and fitful as he pleased. Occasionally he stopped and had a smoke and chat with Dr. Lester; and, much to the amusement of the Cranton family, paid some long visits to Miss Norma.

Next to Bald Hill he liked best to visit the Dunworth farm; but it was more on account of the pleasure he received from the society of Messrs. Parchester, Skitt, and Cruppledean than from that of the master of the house. He could not help feeling a very great pity for Roger Dunworth, and as he well knew that it would not do to exhibit any sentiment of this sort, his efforts at repression resulted in a certain stiffness which was very unpleasant to himself, whatever it might be to any one else.

He was very glad to be able to assure himself that until he had become certain that the engagement between Miss Claverden and Dunworth was positively broken off, he had never thought of such a thing as going in on his own account. This approval of his conscience helped to make the world a bright one to Tom Prouter, and even the shadows caused by his pity for Dunworth were not very dense, nor altogether unpleasant.

On a certain bright morning Mr. Prouter sat by the side of Miss Claverden on the front piazza of Bald Hill. She was busily engaged upon some light sewing, and he had taken a seat for a few minutes to rest himself. As Tom Prouter had never before been heard to say that he was tired, it was indeed well that there happened to be a chair there, in order that this primal experience of fatigue might be relieved.

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It was not very long before Ardis was called into the house and begged her visitor to excuse her. As she left her work and sewing materials on the chair, Prouter felt sure that she would soon be back again; and thrusting his hands into his pockets, leaning back and extending his legs, he gave himself up to the joy of existence. The gently rustling trees, the rose-scented air, the golden sunlight, the stretches of smooth green, the blue sky, the softly sailing clouds, and the momentarily expected return of Ardis made him feel as if he were indeed in Paradise.

Suddenly he sprang to his feet. His eyes glared, the color left his face; and he exclaimed: "The devil!"

Yes, the devil had entered into Paradise. On the high-road, plainly visible from where he stood, in a buggy slowly driven by a boy, he saw Jack Surrey.

With mouth open and eyes dilated Prouter stood, and watched, and waited, and watched. Gradually the buggy approached the Bald Hill gate. It reached it. It did not stop, but passed on.

Prouter gave a little gasp, but before he could assure himself that he felt relieved he heard Ardis returning.

"What is the matter with you, Mr. Prouter?" she exclaimed as she came out on the porch. "You look as if you had seen a ghost, or perhaps snakes."

The young man was now glaring steadfastly in an opposite direction from the road, and as he expected, Ardis' gaze followed his. He continued to glare. "She must not look around," he thought, "until that buggy has passed entirely out of sight."

"What in the world is it?" asked Ardis, now becoming a little alarmed.

"Oh, it's nothing, nothing," said Prouter quickly. "I am subject to this sort of thing—that is to say, I never had any experience of this kind before—but people will

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have certain jumps and agitation without any reason whatever."

"I am glad to hear that," said Ardis. "But won't you have a glass of wine?"

"No, no, no, thank you very much," said Prouter hurriedly. "I must be off now. I've got lots of things to do at home. I ought to have been there long ago."

And taking a hasty leave, he departed. He must hurry away, and see where that incarnate fiend had gone to.

"I hope the poor young man is not in money difficulties and saw the sheriff upon the road," thought Ardis, as she resumed her seat. "Now that I think of it, he was looking so desperately the other way that he must have seen something on the road."

This morning Mr. Prouter had come to Bald Hill on foot, and as soon as he thought himself out of sight of the front piazza he began to run across the lawn and through the orchard, making a diagonal course toward the road in order that he might catch sight of the buggy and the fiend, and see where they were going.

"It may be," he thought, as he ran, "that he intends to drive to Richmond on this road. It would be like him to do that, and if that is the case, the faster he goes the better!"

Reaching the road Prouter vaulted over the fence, hurried onward, and soon rounding a little curve, he beheld the buggy about half a mile ahead of him. He was now on high ground whence he could see the road, or portions of it, for a long distance, and he was satisfied that he could determine whether or not Surrey was going to Richmond. If he turned to the right at Dr. Southey's he was certainly on his way to that city, which was only fifty or sixty miles distant.

But Surrey did not take the road to Richmond. Long

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before he reached Dr. Southey's house he turned to the left, and drove through a gate at the roadside.

"By the lord Harry!" cried Prouter, with such a start that he almost sprang from the ground. "He is going to my house!"

Tom Prouter now ran home at the top of his speed, vengeance in his eye, and destruction in his two clinched fists. The buggy had a long start of him, however, and reached the little house some minutes before his arrival. Hurrying, hot, red and savage, along the rough lane which was to become a stately avenue, Prouter beheld Surrey, cool and smiling, standing in the open doorway of his house. The buggy had been driven away to the back, and on the porch lay two large valises.

A few steps from the house Prouter stopped short. "What is the meaning of this?" he cried. "What are you doing here?"

"Doing?" said Surrey, a slight smile showing under his heavy moustache. "I have come to make you a visit. Didn't you ask me to do so the last time you saw me?"

Prouter swallowed an objuration so big that it almost choked him. "Ask you?" he gasped.

"Certainly," said Surrey, "you invited me. I accepted, and here I am. But come in. I don't like to see you standing outside there."

So saying, Surrey walked back into the room, and Prouter, still boiling, accepted the invitation to enter his own house. Surrey took off his hat, seated himself in an arm-chair near a small table, and looked about him.

"Neat and comfortable," he remarked. "I should say this sort of thing would suit you exactly."

"It doesn't suit me," said Prouter, still standing, and with his hat on. "The house is a makeshift, and doesn't suit at all. And what is more——"

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"Now don't proceed to say," interrupted Surrey, "that it doesn't suit you to have me here, because that would be going back on yourself, which is a thing I don't expect of you."

Prouter breathed a deep, long, rasping breath. "What beastly business brought you here anyway?" he cried.

"The beastly business of visiting you," said Surrey; "I told you that before. And now have you any kind of thing that a man can drink? I am thirsty."

Prouter glared at him for a moment, and then strode to a closet, bringing out a bottle of beer and a tumbler, which he banged down on the table by Surrey. The latter pushed back the fastening of the patent cork, poured out a glass of beer, and drank it with great relish. Then having emptied the remaining contents of the bottle into the tumbler he took a cigar from his pocket, lighted it, and leaned back in his chair.

"Now this is what I call enjoyable," he said, "make-shift, or not."

With heaving breath, red face, and dilated nostrils Prouter stood and stared at him for a few moments. "Now look here," he presently exclaimed, "this sort of thing will not work! You have done mischief enough in these parts! If you had a spark of manliness in you, you wouldn't stay where you are hated by everybody from the cradle to the grave."

Surrey smiled, and Prouter went on. "You are always doing the most devilish things just at the time they ought not to be done."

"I shall be glad to hear," said Surrey, "at what times you think it proper to do devilish things. But we will discuss that later."

"You can't deny it," said Prouter. "You come in

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when everything is happiest, and make a hell upon earth! Here everything is beginning to go straight again——"

"Do you mean," interrupted Surrey, "that Miss Claverden and Dunworth are engaged again?"

"No, I don't!" cried Prouter. "That's all smashed, ruined, done with, and scattered to the winds. There is no possibility of their ever coming together again. You have totally dashed all that into dust and flinders! They are no more to each other than if they had never met."

"Then what do you mean by things going straight?" asked Surrey.

"That is none of your business!" cried Prouter. "I should hate to be a man always prying into things with which he has no concern."

Surrey looked steadily at Prouter for a moment, and then he asked: "Are you courting Miss Claverden?"

"No, I am not!" roared Prouter. "You might as well expect a man to court a woman at her husband's funeral! You needn't suppose everybody has your heathenish ideas about doing things. What I do, or intend to do, or don't intend to do, are my own affairs, and I answer no man in regard to them." And with this remark he stamped angrily up and down the floor.

Surrey took his cigar from his mouth, and drank the glass of beer he had poured out. Then he leaned forward, with his elbow on the table, and addressed the young Englishman. "Now, Prouter," he said, "don't work yourself into a passion. I see exactly how the ground lies, and I may as well tell you at once that if any plan you have made shall fail you shall have no cause to lay the blame on me. So you need give yourself no further trouble about that."

"What do you mean?" said Prouter. "What have you got to do with my plans?"

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"From the way you have been talking," answered Surrey, "one might suppose that I had a good deal to do with them. But, in reality, I have nothing. I did not come down here to pay attentions to Miss Claverden. In fact, I do not expect to see her."

"Then what did you come here for?" asked Prouter.

"I like the country, and I came to see you. Don't you call those reasons enough?"

Prouter stood silent for a moment. Then he walked to the closet and took out another bottle of beer, which he put down before Surrey. After which he thrust his hands into his pockets and looked out through the open doorway.

"It is not a bad country," he said.

Surrey opened the bottle, and poured out a small portion of the beer; and then Prouter returned to the closet and got out another glass, which he filled for himself, and drank. He now opened the back door and looked into the kitchen.

"I drove off my new cook this morning," he remarked. "She was the worst one I have had yet. But another woman promised to come by noon, and if she don't show up soon I'll take my gun and go after her."

"You are a jolly housekeeper," said Surrey.

"I am not half a bad one," answered his host. "I am going to hire a sailor as soon as I can get down to the lower end of the county."

"A queer place to find sailors!" said Surrey. "And what you want with one I do not know. But we won't discuss that at present. I am not troubled about the cooking. If there is no one else to do it, I can do it myself. I have camped out enough to know all about that. You have two bed-rooms in this house, haven't you?"

"Of course I have," anwered Prouter.

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"Well then, suppose you show me to the one that is to be mine." And, so saying, he stepped out on the porch where his baggage had been left.

Prouter took up one of the valises, and led the way upstairs, followed by his guest carrying the other bag.

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CHAPTER XLII.

JACK SURREY had very good grounds for not telling Prouter his object in coming down there, for he could not have given to himself a definite reason for this action. Since he had left Atlanta he had been an aimless and a somewhat dissatisfied wanderer, and after having given a good deal of desultory thought to the subject, the conviction had been forced upon him that no place suited him so well as the neighborhood of Bolton; and he therefore determined to go and make a visit to that amusing young fellow, Tom Prouter.

Having come to this conclusion he seriously assured himself that he was not going down into that region on account of Ardis Claverden. His case had been very definitely settled by that young lady; although, to be sure, circumstances had changed since then, and he did not know whether they had rearranged themselves or not. But he strongly opined that at present the sight of him would be distasteful to Miss Claverden; and that, therefore, he would keep out of her way, at least until he had seen how things were going. Under these circumstances most men would have stayed away altogether. But Jack Surrey was not at all like most men.

It was pleasant to him to think that he was in the same rural neighborhood with Miss Claverden; and that they breathed the same general air. But, on the other hand, his freedom of movement was very much interfered with by his determination to keep out of her way. On public

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roads, and in a town like Bolton, people must of course take their chances of meeting; but by all reasonable methods he would let it be seen that he had no intention of intruding upon her.

This resolution, however, did not interfere with his having a very good time. He took long rambles into the woods and mountains; sometimes with his host, and sometimes without him. Prouter frequently drove him in his dog-cart into town; and very often Surrey borrowed the horse and cart and drove himself where he pleased. He had made acquaintances in the town, and with these he sometimes stopped for a chat; and, after a time, he even called upon some people he had known in the Bald Hill neighborhood.

His success in this respect, however, was not great. When Doctor Lester beheld him approaching his house that worthy gentleman was filled with such feelings of abhorrence that he opened a back window, and leaping out through it, made for the woods. He had heard that this bearer of evil and of misery, this pestilential and shameless man, was staying at Prouter's, but he did not believe that he would have the black-hearted effrontery to call upon him. Surrey found an empty house and went away.

"It would seem," thought the doctor, as he sat on the ground in the heart of the forest, his pipe in his mouth and his back against a tree, "as if the wretch could do no further evil now, but I am not sure; I am not sure. Anyway, the sight of him is evil to me.

The next visit paid by Surrey was to Heatherley where he called upon Miss Norma Cranton. When this young lady received the card of the visitor who had been shown into the parlor, her face flushed, she stamped her foot upon the floor, and declared that she would not go one inch down to see him. Such unparalleled impudence

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she had never heard of! For him to call upon her! What on earth could be the object of his coming?

She stopped the servant, who was on the point of going down-stairs to tell the gentleman that her mistress could not see him, and stood reflecting. Her anger at what she considered the insult of the call did not abate, but it was now mingled with an uncontrollable desire to know what the man could have to say to her. She had heard that he was in the neighborhood, but she had not imagined it possible that he would come to Heatherley to call upon her. But she must know what he wanted; and down-stairs she went.

Norma's reception of Mr. Surrey was decidedly freezing; the temperature of her manner might have been placed at about fifteen degrees above zero. She did not even offer him her hand, but after a slight inclination of the head as she entered the room she sat down near the door, holding herself very erect and not touching the back of the chair.

Surrey resumed his seat which was on the other side of the large room. "I hope, Miss Cranton," he said, "that you have been well since I last saw you."

"Yes," she said, somewhat severely. "Have you any business with me?"

"Yes, Miss Cranton," Surrey replied. "I have called to see you upon business; and I come to you because I believe you to be a lady, who, no matter what you may think of me and my affairs, will speak to me fairly and squarely. I wish to make some very clear and plain statements to you, and I know no one in these parts who is so likely to give plain and clear opinions regarding my statements."

"Indeed!" remarked Miss Cranton.

The assurance of almost any presumptuous man would

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have been congealed by the coldness of her tone, but Surrey had prepared himself for chillness and this had no apparent effect upon him. He proceeded:

"I know very well, for I have been told often enough, that certain misunderstandings which have occurred among your friends hereabouts have been ascribed to my influence. And in speaking of these things I do not wish to beat the bush, or to hint; I desire to speak clearly and plainly, as I said before, and to call things and people by their right names. Those who look upon me as an emissary of mischief—and that there are persons who look upon me in that way I have frequently been informed—are entirely in the wrong. It is no more than justice that I should be allowed to make a straightforward declaration of what I have intended to do, and what I have done. You may think just as badly of me after I have finished speaking as you do now, but still honor and justice demand that I shall be allowed to speak."

Norma looked steadily at him, but made no answer. She was perfectly willing that honor and justice should have their way; and more than willing to hear what was about to be disclosed.

"I came to Bolton and to Bald Hill," continued Surrey, "to see Miss Claverden. I desired to marry her. You perceive I have no concealments. For a time I got on very well, and I had no reason to suppose that I had not as good a chance as any other man. But I discovered that there was another man who had a better chance than myself; but I did not know him as a preferred suitor of Miss Claverden until he suddenly flared up, got jealous, and made a row."

"He had a right to be jealous," said Norma.

"Of course he had," answered Surrey, "a perfect right. But then I am not to blame because he chose to show his

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jealousy as he did. There are better ways of showing that passion which I would have advised had I been consulted. When I found how matters stood I went away and left the field clear. I don't pretend to say that I went away willingly, or that I was in any hurry to go. I was as much in earnest as anybody concerned in the affair. If there was any chance left for me I wanted to stay and see what it was."

"If you had kept away from her when you did leave, Mr. Surrey," said Norma, "all might have been well; but it was perfectly wicked of you to go down after her to Georgia!"

"I differ with you, Miss Cranton," said Surrey. "I had reason to believe that Miss Claverden was at Atlanta and I went down there on purpose to see her. I have no intention of concealing the actual truth. Her engagement with Dunworth had then been broken off for some time, and I did not know in what way her feelings might have changed, and I determined to go and find out. I maintain that I had a perfect right to go and find out."

"But you had no right to make all the trouble you did make," said Norma, "and totally ruin the happiness of two lives."

"I had nothing to do with all that," said Surrey. "That trouble was arranged entirely by Miss Claverden and Dunworth. One got angry at my being there, and challenged me to fight a duel; the other discarded her lover because he fought a duel; that was all there was of it. I went there with no intention of making trouble, and indeed I did everything a man could do to avoid making trouble. I accepted the challenge, of course, because I am no coward, and will give no man the opportunity to look upon me as such, but I made up my mind that I would not wound a woman, especially a woman whom I had loved

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and would be glad to love again. If I killed Dunworth I should inflict a terrible grief upon Miss Claverden. I therefore resolved to fire in the air, and I did fire in the air. Could more than that be expected of a man?"

"No," said Norma, her eyes turned upward toward the portrait of a male ancestor which hung upon the wall. "A brave man could do no more nor less than what you did after you were challenged. But the trouble came from what you did before that."

"But I still maintain," said Surrey, "that I ought not to be held accountable for it. I assert that what I did was straightforward and above board. If I found things as I hoped they might be, so much the better for me; if I found them not so, so much the worse; in either case I should have accepted my fate, and there would have been an end of it."

"If you had spoken in this way before, Mr. Surrey," said Norma, "it would have been much better for everybody."

"I never had a chance to speak," he answered. "I am always willing enough to talk, and to put myself on record in the largest kind of letters; but down here nobody has taken the trouble to consult me in the least. Our good friends have simply come to their own conclusions, and settled matters in their own way."

"We have a perfect right to do that, Mr. Surrey," said Norma, "but of course it might have been better if things had been really discussed."

"Well, we will not speak any more of that, Miss Cranton," said Surrey. "Fault enough has been found with me, I think you will admit, but I have not the least disposition to strike back. I came down here this time because I like the country and I like the people. Because I lost what I came for on my first visit is no reason why I should give up everything else. I had an idea of settling in this

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region, and I do not know why I should banish that idea now. I should like ever so much to have an orchard and a vineyard and all that sort of thing. I envy the independent life that young Prouter leads."

"Then I suppose you would have your son with you," said Norma, whose mind in this planning for the future had far outrun that of the speaker.

A slight look of surprise appeared on Surrey's face, and then he smiled. "Yes," he said, "when he is old enough he would come down to visit me, of course. But just now he is only six, and his mother's family have charge of him. They guard him as if he were a perishable diamond. I expect I shall be delighted to have him live with me, but I must wait until he is a great deal older before that can be arranged. At present I am entirely alone. As I said before, I should like to make a home in this neighborhood. But I think you will agree with me that it would be pretty hard for me to come and settle down here among a lot of enemies."

"Of course it would," promptly replied Norma.

"Now I want to be friendly with all of you. There is not a man nor woman in this county toward whom I feel the least enmity. I should like to go to Dunworth, and take him by the hand and tell him that so far as I am concerned the past is all forgotten and ask him to forget it. And then, there is Dr. Lester. He is a jolly, good old fellow, but I don't believe he would shake hands with me. As for Major Claverden he is the finest specimen of an old Virginia gentleman I ever saw, and I want to be on good terms with him."

"O Mr. Surrey," said Norma, "I think you are perfectly right in wanting to make friends with the people who may become your neighbors; but I beg of you not to go see Mr. Dunworth, and not to go to Bald Hill—at

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least for the present. Perhaps after awhile it won't matter, but do not go now."

During this protracted conversation the temperature of Norma's demeanor had been gradually rising, and now it was, at least, at sixty degrees; temperate certainly, with a suspicion of warmth in it. Surrey had noticed this change, but he had not taken the slightest advantage of it. He had not seated himself nearer to her, nor did his voice or manner betray any recognition of a thaw in her bearing toward him. He had too much tact to do anything which might alarm her, or make her think she was speaking too freely to a man whom she had always detested.

"I do not see, Miss Cranton," he answered, "that I could do any harm by going to either of those houses; but as I told you, I came here, not only to speak clearly and plainly, but to listen to what you might clearly and plainly say to me. I felt sure that you would speak in that way; and since you feel so strongly about it I am perfectly willing to defer to it; and I promise you I will not go to Bald Hill, nor to the Dunworth farm until I am quite sure no further complications will ensue. In fact I am willing to put the matter into your hands. When you say I may go, I will go."

And, so saying, he arose, and Norma left her chair and involuntarily made two or three steps toward him. "Mr. Surrey," she said, "you must not do that! I cannot take on myself such a responsibility! In fact I really have nothing to do with the matter, and I only speak on account of my friendly feeling toward—toward—everybody."

"I am sure of that," said Surrey, making a leisurely step or two in her direction.

"And as to your making friends in this neighborhood," said Norma, "I am willing to do everything I can to help you; and I am sure Mr. Prouter will introduce you to all

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the English families about here; and there are the Dalrymples, whom perhaps you know already; and, in fact, there is a good deal of society here, though, of course, somewhat scattered."

"You are very good," said Surrey, "and I must thank you, Miss Cranton, for the straightforward and satisfactory manner in which you have talked with me. And now I will bid you good afternoon."

He extended his hand to her with an air as if it were the most natural thing in the world for him to do so, and Norma took it as if it were the most natural thing in the world for her to do so. And as he left, she followed him out on the porch.

"Mr. Surrey," she said, "I feel as if I ought to thank you for the promise you made, and I do hope that you will not see any reason for changing your mind."

"No fear of that," said Surrey. "With me a promise is a promise. And though you do not insist upon it I intend to confer with you before I visit either the Claverdens or Dunworth. Is not that Mr. Cranton?"

"Yes," said Norma, "that is my father."

Mr. Cranton was a small man, plain in appearance, and retiring in disposition. He attended closely to the business of his farm, avoided company, and to casual visitors at Heatherley was almost unknown. But he was a man of education and reading, and those who were so fortunate as to know him well enough to spend an evening with him found him an agreeable and profitable talker.

"I should like very much to know Mr. Cranton," said Surrey. "Will you present me?"

"Certainly," said Norma. And as her father came nearer, his eyes bent on the ground, she called to him. "Father," she said, "this is Mr. Surrey. I want to make you acquainted with him."

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Mr. Cranton looked up, put down a wooden rake which he was bringing to the house to mend, and approached the steps, but before he reached them Surrey ran quickly down and shook hands with him. After expressing his pleasure at making the acquaintance, and declining an invitation to stay to dinner, which came as naturally to Mr. Cranton as would a remark about the weather, Surrey raised his hat to Norma and departed.

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CHAPTER XLIII.

ON the afternoon when Jack Surrey walked from Prouter's house to Heatherley, Dr. Lester, through his open window, saw him pass along the road. The doctor was a man of kindly temper and of gentle manner, but as his eyes fell upon Surrey he struck his fist upon the table by which he was sitting, and exclaimed: "Perdition take him!"

The doctor's mind was discomposed, and he could not go on with his work. He was copying and restoring for Major Claverden a dilapidated map of the Bald Hill estate; but thoughts of Surrey would not coincide with precise lines and careful measurements.

"I wonder," said the doctor to himself as he walked up and down the room, "if she knows he is here. She should be put upon her guard. Not that there is actual danger to her, but her eyes should not be permitted to fall upon him. It might be well for her to go away for a time. At any rate she should know that he is here; most certainly she should know."

After a little more striding about the room, the doctor put away his drawing materials, took up his hat and his grapevine walking-stick, and set out for Bald Hill.

When he arrived there he was told that Miss Ardis was in her studio. The doctor was sorry to hear this; he did not like the studio. When he saw Ardis there she generally wore a long apron covered with dabs of various-colored paints. He did not think the most perfect beauty

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in the whole world should appear in an attire like this, nor did it coincide with his ideas of propriety that a lady of her station and family, a lady who in appearance, breeding, and blood was worthy to consort with the noblest in rank and to wed with royalty, should ever be seen in apparel the least unkempt, and working with more or less grimy oils and paints. He had the highest possible opinion of her pictures, but he did not like to see her paint.

In spite of this dislike, and it would have been a very strong dislike for surroundings and occupation which would have kept him away from Ardis, the doctor walked down to the old stone building which served for a studio. The doors and the windows were all open, and before he reached the house the doctor saw Ardis, and he was surprised and delighted to perceive that she was not attired in the unpleasing garb of an artist; and that, apparently, she was not painting. She was seated near the large north window at the end of the room, and as the doctor knocked on the frame of the open side door before entering, she looked up and gave a little start.

It was very unusual for Ardis to start at the entrance of any one, but when she saw Dr. Lester at the door she was the least bit in the world embarrassed, and a good deal amused. She was engaged in embroidering some velvet which was to be made into a pair of slippers; and these were to be given to Dr. Lester on his birthday, which would occur in a few weeks. Not wishing that he should see this present until it was finished, and knowing that he would not be very likely to drop in upon her at the studio, she had come here.

This early summer afternoon was warm and Ardis was dressed in white, which, according to the doctor's opinion, displayed her beauty to perfection. She wore a pink girdle and some pink roses at her bosom, and in her face, as

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her visitor entered, there was a little more of pink than was usual with her.

But Ardis almost instantly recovered from her slight surprise, and the feeling of amusement at the speedy overthrow of her little scheme only served to give additional brightness to her reception of the doctor. His eyes sparkled with delight. They could do nothing for him which made him more truly thankful that he owned them than to show him Ardis thus.

When he had seated himself, Ardis turned the velvet toward him and asked him how he liked the floral decorations which had begun to appear upon it. The doctor had not the least idea of the ultimate object of this piece of work, but he thought the embroidery beautiful. He liked to see Ardis doing such things as this. How charming her white and delicately-formed hand appeared against the glossy surface of the velvet!

The studio seemed a new place to the doctor that day. He sat with his back to the easels, the paints, the brushes the canvases standing with their faces to the wall, and all that artistic disorder which so jarred upon his sense of what was fitting for Ardis. Before him was the loveliest woman in the world, relieved by a background of green leaves, sunlight, vines, and the softened hues of distant foliage. It seemed to him a wrong and cruel thing to bring bad news into such a Paradise, but he had come to perform what he believed to be a duty and he must not shrink from it.

"Miss Ardis," he said, "my object in calling upon you to-day is to inform you of something which may surprise and annoy you. Mr. Surrey is again in this neighborhood."

Ardis smiled. "You are always good, doctor," she said, "and it is very good indeed of you to come and tell me that; but I knew it already. I have not seen him, but

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some of the servants mentioned that he was staying with Mr. Prouter."

"But what are you going to do about it?" asked the doctor earnestly. "I am grieved and indignant that this man should have had the hardihood to show himself in this part of the country. I can hardly suppose that he possesses the effrontery to present himself at your house, but I do not know. He is capable of almost anything! And in going about the country you are liable to encounter him at any time."

Ardis laid her work in her lap and turned her eyes upon the doctor. "Dr. Lester," said she, "let us have a little quiet talk upon this subject. Mr. Surrey is nothing to me, and I do not intend that his appearance here shall disturb me in the least. I do not think it is very good taste in him to appear in this neighborhood, but I cannot discompose myself on account of his want of taste. I speak very plainly to you, doctor, because you are such a dear friend, and I want you to know that all the trouble I went through with, and which you so bravely went through with me, is now a thing of the past. I am resolved that it shall be so. As to Mr. Surrey, he is, of course, free to visit or to go where he pleases. He can come to this county, or go to another; I have nothing to do with it. If I meet him I shall acknowledge that I know him—that is all. I have no fear that he will endeavor to renew his former acquaintance with either me or my father; his not coming here proves that. But if he should so endeavor, I can readily make him understand that he is nothing more than one of many men whom I merely know.

"And while I am talking to you in this way, doctor, I want to impress upon you that all in which Mr. Surrey could make trouble, has disappeared. I have thought a great deal about you, doctor, in connection with this mat-

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ter, and I hope most earnestly that you do not think me inconstant, or changeable."

"Indeed, I do not!" replied the doctor, the words coming from his very heart of hearts.

Ardis thrust into the velvet the embroidery needle, which she had been holding, and extended her hand to the doctor. "That is right!" she said. "I can always trust to you."

The doctor took her hand and held it for some seconds. A wild desire seized him to drop upon his knees and kiss it. Why not? He had kissed that girl a thousand times when she was a child. And, more than that, she herself, since she had been grown up, not very long ago—but here his thoughts stopped. A sudden coldness came over him. He had remembered too much. Very gently and respectfully he released her hand.

She continued: "What I have done was done because perfect trust and loyalty is absolutely necessary to me. I trust and am truly loyal, and I demand the same. It was not easy for me to bring myself to this way of thinking. I went through a terrible trial, but I determined to do my duty to myself and to—to Roger Dunworth. I would not ruin the happiness of my life, nor the happiness of his life. And now we come round again to our text, which is that Mr. Surrey is not of the slightest importance."

She took up her work and recommenced her embroidery.

"I am glad to hear that," said the doctor. "I merely dreaded to have him near you; that is all."

"Doctor," said Ardis, looking out of the great window at the leaves and the vines and the sunlight, "I wish there were more like you! Then we could trust, and be trusted; and this world would be a sensible one, and a happy one."

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The doctor murmured something in reply, and looked upon the floor. Was this last stroke necessary?

Not long after this the doctor left. Walking meditatively homeward he saw on the other side of the road Mr. Surrey coming jauntily down from Heatherley. The doctor's first impulse was to turn his head the other way and increase his pace; but he instantly remembered that this was what he ought not to do. He now knew that she meant to treat the man politely, and as a person of no importance, and that he would please her by also treating him politely; and therefore when he was nearly opposite Surrey, he bowed.

The latter immediately stopped but did not cross the road. He intended to be very wary and prudent in such matters. "Good day, doctor!" he cried cheerily. "I am glad to see you looking so well."

"Thank you," said the doctor, and passed on. He felt degraded, but he would have done the same thing again.

As he walked homeward a fresh trouble lay upon the soul of the doctor. Ardis had told him just before he left her that she had intended spending the next two days at Rocklands, a country house about twenty miles distant. This announcement caused an uneasiness in the doctor. The son and heir of Rocklands was a dashing and handsome young fellow. Ardis would be two days with him. Certain possibilities, when connected with Ardis, always troubled the doctor when they first presented themselves to him.

"How foolish it is," he said to himself, as he struck his heavy cane on the ground, "What an ass! what a dolt I am! This young man is nothing, and if he were anything, what is that to me? Why should I ache about such things? There is no reason, no sense, no propriety, no excuse for it! It must be stopped!"

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But the ache continued all the same.

The next day, in the pleasantest part of the afternoon, there came riding to Bald Hill, Mr. Egbert Dalrymple. He wore a fresh summer suit, and in his buttonhole a flower, with a hue indicative of the approaching maturity of the season. When he had dismounted and had come to the house he was informed by the maid who came to the door that Miss Claverden was not at home.

"So!" exclaimed Mr. Dalrymple, knitting his brows, and glancing darkly at his feet. Then suddenly elevating his countenance, he asked: "Are you sure of that? Speak the truth now!"

The mind of the maid was somewhat fired by this remark.

"Of course I'm shuah of it!" she said. "She went away right after breakfas' this mornin' and told me she wouldn't be back for two days."

"Where did she go?" asked Mr. Dalrymple, folding his arms as he spoke.

The woman had a notion, not altogether instinctive, that this was none of the young man's business, and she answered: "She's gone ever so far. She didn't give me no address."

Dalrymple looked at her steadily. "I have a strong belief," he said, "that she is in this house."

Now the fire in the soul of the maid blazed up. Seeing Major Claverden approaching across the lawn, she ran down to him and informed him, with as much respectful deference as her angry soul allowed, that there was a gentleman at the door who wanted to see Miss Ardis, and who as much as said to her that she bore false witness when she told him that Miss Ardis had gone away.

The major looked up at the house and recognized Dalrymple. "Did you tell him where Miss Ardis had gone?" he asked.

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"No indeed, sir," replied the servant, "and I don't reckon he'd 'a' b'lieved me, if I had."

"Very well," said the major, "I will see him."

The major slowly ascended the steps of the piazza, and gravely but courteously, shook hands with the young man. "Will you walk into my library, sir?" said he.

Egbert Dalrymple gazed past him at a solitary floating cloud and asked: "Is your daughter within, sir?"

"Will you kindly walk into my library?" repeated the major more emphatically than before.

Dalrymple raised his eyebrows, and then, without a word, followed the major into the library. The latter closed the door and invited his visitor to be seated. When he had settled himself comfortably in his favorite arm-chair, the major crossed his legs, fixed his eyes upon Dalrymple, and remarked: "I believe, sir, that you have been informed that my daughter is not at home."

"The servant so said," replied the other, "but I place small credence in the words of such people."

"Sir," said the major, still speaking quietly and courteously, although with an unusual lack of smoothness in his tones, "the domestics in my house, when in discharge of their duties, speak the truth. Were they discovered doing otherwise they would not remain here an instant. That is all that is necessary to be said upon that point. And now, sir, I wish to ask you why you came here to-day to see my daughter? She has informed me of what occurred at your latest visit here, and has repeated to me the answer she made to your overtures. Now, do you come here merely as a neighbor to visit my house in an ordinary social manner, or do you come to persist in a suit which you have been positively and decidedly forbidden to make?"

"I come," said Dalrymple, folding his arms and looking

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straight before him, "because all that is in me, my soul of souls, the faculties of my intellect, and the affections of my heart; all indeed that is truly me, belong to your daughter. My part in life is to bring all this and to lay it before her. Rebuffs, prohibitions, are but as the wind that blows; storm-wind though it be. I bow. The tempest passes; and I rise again. Therefore am I here."

Major Claverden uncrossed his legs; he sat up in his chair, leaning slightly forward. His eyes were bright and his voice, although stern, was not raised. "And therefore, sir," said he, "I am going to place you in a position which no one has held in my lifetime, nor during the lifetime of my father, nor, to the best of my belief, during that of my grandfather. I am going to forbid you to set foot upon this estate! It grieves and mortifies me, sir, to say such a thing to the son of a neighbor, a resident of this community. But never in my life did I imagine that any one could appear before me, and declare with the shameless effrontery which you have exhibited, his intention to continue, against all protests, the persecution and annoyance of a lady. It is not to be borne, sir! You may go!"

And at these last words the major rose to his feet. Egbert Dalrymple also stood up.

"So!" he ejaculated. And then, with a bow, he turned and left the room.

The major followed him to the hall door. Dalrymple stepped out on the piazza, and then he stopped. Suddenly he turned around.

"Will you inform me, sir," he said, "at what house your daughter is visiting?"

The major's face grew fiery red. A storm of indignation rose within him, and angry words crowded to his lips; but before he could utter one of them a tall negro man with a spade upon his shoulder appeared around a corner of

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the house. To quarrel at his own door, and to say something in the presence of his own servants of which he might afterward feel ashamed, was impossible for Major Claverden.

Stepping forward to the railing of the piazza he said, in a voice which, though trembling, was tranquil compared to that which had been on the point of bursting from him: "Henry, put down that spade, and go with this young man to the outer gate and close it behind him."

"Yaas, sah," said the negro, touching his hat.

Egbert Dalrymple, followed by Henry, rode slowly to the outer gate. On his way he drew from his buttonhole the flower which indicated the coming maturity of summer. He held it in his hand, and looked at it.

"Faded?" he murmured. "Hardly." And he replaced it in his buttonhole.

When he reached the gate he put his hand in his pocket, gave the colored man a quarter of a dollar, and rode away.

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CHAPTER XLIV.

ARDIS CLAVERDEN returned from her visit in a somewhat disturbed state of mind. For two whole evenings, and two whole days, the young fellow at Rocklands had unremittingly courted her. She was annoyed and disappointed. At her former visits to this place nothing of the kind had occurred. The young fellow and his sisters had been pleasant companions for her; she had liked them all. But now the sisters had been thrown into the background.

The fact was that Ardis had forgotten that circumstances had very much changed. It had long been understood in the neighborhood—better understood indeed than by the persons concerned—that she and Roger Dunworth were intended for each other, and there was but little local interference with what was known to be the most cherished plan of the master of Bald Hill. But now Ardis was free, and therefore other people were free.

The major did not inform his daughter of the Dalrymple incident. He was very much disturbed and annoyed himself at having been obliged to speak to that young man in the way in which he had spoken. It had been a necessary thing to do, but as the master of a house famed for long years for its genial hospitality, it had been very hard for him. The man had been sent away, definitely and decidedly, but the major shrank from telling his daughter how he had been sent away.

The disquietude which Ardis's visit to Rocklands had caused her did not last long, but it aroused in her an in-

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tense desire to do something, and to do it vigorously; and as painting was the work in which she delighted, she went vigorously to painting. Hitherto, Ardis's taste had inclined to head and figure painting, and landscape, when it appeared, was subordinated to the rest of the picture; but now her fancy turned its back upon the human form, and she determined to begin a large work which should be purely landscape. She decided upon a woodland scene, and in a moment of very pardonable petulance she gave her picture, even before she began it, the title: "Without a Man."

She had had enough of men; at least for the present. Say what she might please about the presence of Surrey in the neighborhood making no difference to her, it did make a difference. She did not walk out nor ride as frequently as she might have done for fear she should meet him. Of course it was of no consequence if she did meet him; but she did not wish to do so. She might think of Mr. Dalrymple as having been definitely dismissed, but the very thought of him annoyed her. To that lively young man, Tom Prouter, she gave no consideration as a suitor, but his visits had begun to be a little tiresome. Fortunately, since Mr. Surrey had been his guest, he had come but seldom. And, although the young fellow at Rocklands was not worth considering at all, his attentions had been so pointed and his manner so ardent that she could not entirely forget him.

But she had one compensation. There should be no man in her picture! Art was independent, and it could take in and leave out whatever it pleased.

About a quarter of a mile from the Bald Hill house was a piece of woodland, partly of evergreens, and partly of chestnut and oak. A little stream ran through these woods, and in it were many picturesque spots. One of

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these nooks Ardis selected as the subject of her picture. It was a little amphitheatre entirely surrounded by trees, but with glimpses of vistas here and there, and every chance for effects of sunlight through the Pantheon-like opening above.

This pleasant spot was not only a charming subject for a picture, but it also made an admirable studio; and here, every morning, Ardis came, accompanied by Uncle Shad carrying her easel and painting materials; the canvas she never trusted to his hands. When she had established herself the old man left her. It was a retired spot where no one was likely to come; and if she had needed assistance it would not have been difficult to summon it. It would have been easier, in fact, than she herself imagined it, for the Major had ordered Uncle Shad, from the time he left Miss Ardis in the woods, to the hour when he had been told to come for her, to work in a part of the great garden where he could easily hear his mistress, if she wanted anything and should call. More than that, she had always the company of Monaco, her father's old pointer.

Ardis was charmed with her studio, and if the fine weather continued long enough, she determined to sketch, and finish her picture in it. It should grow up and come to maturity in the way where the trees, the vines, the bushes, and the delicate wood-flowers depicted on its canvas had grown up.

It happened to be a season of fine weather. The farmers did not like it because their crops would have been the better for some rain; but it suited Ardis admirably. If she worked hard she could finish her picture before a change of the moon, or whatever it was that regulated the weather, should cover the fair blue sky with dull and heavy clouds laden with rain.

Between the wood where Ardis was painting and the

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house grounds was a small stretch of open grassy fields; and one morning Mr. Surrey, standing in the high road, saw Ardis and the dog, followed by the old negro carrying the easel, the camp stool, and the box, cross this open space and enter the woods.

It was the first time that Surrey had seen her during his present visit. She was at a considerable distance, but his eyes were sharp, and they dwelt with sparkling pleasure upon the vision of this charming girl crossing the green field. He could discern the profile of her face, shadowed as it was by her hat. Every fold and flutter of her dress seemed to him full of grace, and it was a joy to look upon that lithe, erect figure, stepping so quickly and lightly over the turf.

Jack Surrey was not in the habit of denying himself any joy which he could get for nothing or for which he did not have to pay too much. He did not deny himself this one. He stood, leaning on the fence, and watched her. The canvas in her hand, and the negro's burden, showed plainly the object of her walk.

"She is on her way to those woods to sketch," said Surrey to himself. "By George! it is a vile extravagance; it is a waste of blissful influence for her to go and sketch in those woods and nobody with her but that old negro! But the waste will have to be waste, I suppose. There is nothing for me in that quarter."

He watched her until she passed out of sight among the trees, and then he remained at the fence, his eyes still upon the spot where she had disappeared. Presently he saw the old negro come out of the woods and take his way toward the house.

"Well," exclaimed Surrey, starting back from the fence, "this is a pretty state of affairs! I don't call it exactly safe! However, the dog is with her."

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With his hands thrust into his pockets, as if he could thus express the force of his emotions, Surrey strolled along the roadside toward Prouter's house. Then he turned and strode back again to the place from which he had seen Ardis. Whether he was waiting to see her recross the open space, or whether he felt that by remaining in that locality he was exercising a certain protection over her, he could not have readily answered. Anyway it pleased him as well to be there as anywhere else; and, lighting a cigar, he continued to walk up and down the path by the roadside, sometimes making long stretches and sometimes short ones.

Tom Prouter, who was on the top of a hill in the neighborhood looking for a good site for a reservoir in case he should conclude to pump water from the lowlands to a height from which it could run in a pipe to his domain, caught sight of Surrey, and stopped to look at him. At first he wanted to see where he was going; and then seeing him make a turn, he watched him again and saw him make several turns.

"What's the matter with him?" he said to himself. "If I wanted to walk I'd go somewhere! There are plenty of places to go to; why don't he go to one? I asked him to come up here with me, but he said he felt too lazy. And well he might say so, for that's what I call beastly lazy; walking and going nowhere."

The thought now struck Prouter that it would be a fine thing to take this opportunity of going over to see Miss Claverden. The recent infrequency of his visits to Bald Hill had been entirely owing to the fear that if Surrey knew he intended to go there he would offer to accompany him. To be sure, his guest had asserted that he had no further designs upon the lady of that house; but, for all that, Prouter thought it would be very well not to sub-

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ject him to temptation. Now, here was a chance of getting to Bald Hill without Surrey knowing anything about it, and he hastened to avail himself of it. He ran along the top of the hill, down the other side of it, around its base, over a field, across the road, and so to the other side of the Bald Hill house, which he approached by the valley of the little stream which ran at the bottom of the lawn. By taking this circuitous and cautiously-planned route Prouter made it impossible for Surrey to see him, even if the latter extended his walk some distance in this direction.

When he reached the house Prouter was told that Miss Claverden was not at home, and that the major had gone to Bolton. Whereupon he departed in a straight line for his own house and berated the laborers in his vineyard.

When Surrey began to tire a little of walking, he climbed a fence and sat down under a tree. Here he was not noticeable, either from field or road. How many cigars he smoked before he saw Uncle Shad go down to the woods and soon after reappear carrying the paraphernalia, as he followed his mistress with the canvas, Surrey did not know. He had been busily thinking.

From the time that Ardis again came into view to the moment she disappeared from his sight Surrey never took his eyes from her. Then he arose and wended his way toward Prouter's house.

"That is a big canvas!" he thought as he walked. "And the old darkey carried all her painting traps! She is not sketching—she is painting; and if it does not rain, it is ten to one she will go there again to-morrow."

It did not rain the next day; and again Surrey saw Ardis pass the open space. Again he saw her return home. The third day was the same. And during that morning Surrey had a discussion with himself.

"This is getting to be rather a heavy game," he said to

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himself, "and Fate is coming it somewhat too strong on me! I can stand about as much temptation as any man, but this sort of thing is too much of the whirlpool order, and I seem to be going round the outer edge of it. What ought a man to do in such a case, anyway? Am I not making an ass of myself by dawdling about here within five minutes' walk of her, when it might be the easiest thing, the most natural thing in the world, just to drop in on her? It would be a perfect accident, of course; and ten to one she would not mind it in the least. In fact, she might like it! It is more than probable, indeed, that she would be very glad to have me drop in on her—at least in that way. But, on the other hand, when I started down here I swore off from everything of the kind. When a man has fought a duel with a girl's lover and has broken off the match, and has been squarely and positively discarded himself, it is a little out of order for him to have anything more than a bowing acquaintance with the lady in question. I have vowed to myself that I would not go near her. And now see what a pressure in the other direction is brought upon me! I may have been a fool to come here, but that point can be dropped: I am here."

Soon after this Ardis passed toward her house. The face of the canvas she carried was turned toward Surrey; and even at this distance he could see that a woodland scene was beginning to appear upon it.

"There will be a lot of work on that picture yet," he said to himself. And he looked up to the sky. There were no signs of coming bad weather.

When Surrey reached home it was past luncheon time.

"Are you making up a piece for the papers?" asked Prouter. "I knew a fellow who had to write one thing a week for the Fligwich Courier; and, by George! he had to slouch up and down the Parson's Mile for a day or two

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every week before he got the thing worked out in his head! Is that your lay?"

"Can't say," said Surrey. "I don't know whether my little job is to be a piece for the papers or not. But I think that will be settled before long."

The next day Surrey was not the cool and self-possessed man that he usually was. After he had seen Ardis pass into the woods he did not get over the fence into the field, but remained on the roadside. For some reason he seemed greatly to prefer the roadside.

"Now," said he to himself, "I surely am a fool if I keep up this sort of thing any longer! I can't go lounging about here without people noticing it. Prouter may wonder why I always choose one place to write my piece, and if he comes here and sees her he will put in his oar; and that will end the business. I have waited long enough. If I do anything I ought to do it to-day. But whether to do anything or not is the point!"

When Surrey had previously said to himself that it would be an easy and natural thing to drop in upon Ardis while painting in the woods, he had spoken understandingly. He had a great fancy for walking about and exploring; and during his prolonged visit at Bald Hill he had made himself thoroughly acquainted with the surrounding country.

He knew all about this piece of woodland. He had walked through it often. He knew the path that led to it from the direction of the house, and he knew also that not a quarter of a mile beyond the spot where he took his observations a narrow roadway, now unused and greatly overgrown, led from the high-road into the heart of the woods. At the entrance to this road was a gate which was nailed up, but between one of the gate posts and the next fence post was a space, not wide enough to admit

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the passage of a horse or cow, but through which an ordinary man could pass with ease.

Frequently had Surrey, returning from a walk, slipped through this gap and taken the shady woodland road toward the house. Now, what was there to prevent him from taking this route through the woods to-day? He did not know exactly where Ardis was painting, but he could not fail to get sight of her. He did not see why anybody could object to his passing through those woods, nor why anybody should imagine that he had had the least idea that he should find an artist at work therein. Simple? Why, nothing could be more simple and ordinary! If her greeting should be cold, he could pass on. If she received him pleasantly, he would stop. He would be governed entirely by her manner.

"By George!" he said to himself. And then he stopped. "But no. I will walk slowly toward that gap, and when I get there I will positively decide."

Surrey started on his walk leisurely toward the point where he was to make his decision; and he had not gone half the distance when he noticed a man coming down the road and approaching him. The man was still at some distance, but Surrey recognized him. It was Roger Dunworth.

Surrey was a little surprised to see Dunworth on foot, but otherwise his only feeling was one of satisfaction. He had wanted to speak with Dunworth and had hoped that he might some time meet him on the road. He wished to say to his late antagonist that, so far as he was concerned, by-gones were by-gones; that he was really sorry at the turn events had taken on account of the duel; and that he had come down here because he liked the country and the people, and that he had no desire to interfere with anybody's purposes or aims. On these points he

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intended to dilate more or less according to the spirit in which Dunworth met him. It would be an important step toward creating a friendly feeling in the neighborhood if he were to come to a satisfactory understanding with Dunworth.

To be sure, this was not the time he would have chosen for the interview, but it would do very well. The decision which he was going to make when he arrived at the gap could be postponed for a short time.

It was indeed an unusual thing for Roger Dunworth to be seen afoot. He was a horseman by nature; and being also a busy man, he seldom wasted his time by walking on the roads. But this morning he had been making some measurements in one of his outlying fields, and when he had finished he determined not to go back to the house, but to walk to Bald Hill. He had been very busy making plans and surveys of his farm, and inventories of his stock and other property. He intended to offer his place for sale, and had reason to believe that he could easily dispose of it. When this business should be completed it was his purpose to buy in Georgia a large tract of land which he had thoroughly examined in his trip through that region.

So far he had not spoken of his plans to any one, but now that they were well perfected, he wished to make them known to his old friend and the friend of the family, Major Claverden. Of course this loyal Virginian would scout the idea that it would be for the advantage of a man to emigrate from this county to Georgia; but Dunworth was prepared for objections, and knew very well that he should not be turned from his purpose. He wished to explain the matter to the major before the latter heard about it from any one else; but not until this morning had he been able to bring his mind to the point of going to Bald Hill.

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It would be very hard for him to go to the house in which Ardis lived, and he was willing to postpone this ordeal as long as possible; but Major Claverden, as well as Ardis, lived at Bald Hill, and Roger did not even consider the possibility of making the radical change he contemplated without seeing the major. Soul-harrowing topics might be touched upon in the interview, but this could not be helped. If possible he would avoid seeing Ardis; and he believed she would make it possible.

When Dunworth, striding rapidly along the road, raised his eyes and beheld Surrey coming toward him, he, too, experienced a certain satisfaction. He had heard that Surrey was visiting Prouter, and had thought that if he happened to meet the man he would say to him that he had had no intention of wounding him in the affair in which they had been engaged, and that, indeed, he had not known, until some time afterward, that Surrey had been wounded.

But as Surrey came nearer there was something in the expression of his countenance, something in the jaunty manner of his walk, something in the man's demeanor and appearance, which so grated upon the soul of Dunworth, and which brought up so forcibly the recollection of miserable moments, that a sudden chill ran through him. He could not meet that man; he could not speak to him; at least not now—on his way to Bald Hill.

He was on the point of turning back, but at that moment he reached the gap by the side of the old gate. Without hesitation he turned and went through the opening. This was a perfectly natural thing to do. Surrey need not suppose that he had recognized him; nor could any one have reason to imagine that it had not been his original intention to take this path through the woods.

Dunworth disappeared among the trees and the heavy

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undergrowth, and Surrey stopped as if he had been shot.

"By the Lord Harry!" he exclaimed. "Here's a pretty piece of business! Did he turn in there because he saw me? He'll walk straight upon her! Straight to her he is bound to go! Did I do that? Did the sight of me turn him square around and send him into those woods?"

For some minutes Surrey stood still by the roadside. "Now am I well paid," he ejaculated, "for my stupid, my asinine hesitation! It is of no use for me to go in there now; and it is ten thousand to one that it will rain to-morrow!"

With this Surrey jammed his hands into his pockets, clinching his fists so that his nails nearly punctured the flesh. Suddenly he took a resolution. He would go to his old point of observation, and when he saw Dunworth come out into the open field he would himself go into those woods and find Ardis. Of what might happen he took no thought. He considered only that after this morning there might be no chance of finding her in those woods.

With this determination he went to the spot from which he could command the open space between the wood and Bald Hill, and watched.

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CHAPTER XLV.

WHEN Roger Dunworth had suddenly turned aside into the woods, his pace became slower. There was reason for this, for the roadway was uneven, and, besides, he was thinking in that undetermined way which makes people walk slowly. His avoidance of Surrey had been entirely a matter of impulse, and now he asked himself if this were right and manly. It was probable that Surrey had recognized him, and might well suppose that the animosity which occasioned the duel still continued on Dunworth's side. This was not at all desired by Roger. But he would not turn back now. He would go to Prouter's house and see Surrey. That would be a straightforward and satisfactory thing to do.

Having come to this conclusion, Dunworth stepped on a little more briskly; but when he had walked half through this piece of woodland he suddenly stopped. The roadway curved to the right in the direction of the Bald Hill house, but there was a short pathway to the left, and happening to glance along this to an open space beyond, Dunworth saw a woman's dress; he saw a woman sitting on a stool; he saw Ardis Claverden painting in the woods.

Her back was partly turned toward him and he could see a portion of her side face. She was sitting in the shade, and her hat was thrown upon the ground. Her hair seemed softer and more abundant than he had ever seen it before. She did not wear the long apron of the studio, and her cool, fresh morning costume showed charmingly against the leafy background.

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The woods were very still. Some patches of morning sunlight lay upon the ground behind Ardis, and over these moved gently the shadows of high-growing leaves and twigs which caught the breeze. He stood and watched every movement that she made. All was quiet and tranquil without, but a great sea began to roll in upon his soul; deeper and deeper it swelled; brighter and stronger grew its waves. Before him was Ardis Claverden, the love of his life.

The sea rose higher and higher. Everything that had been built by her or by him to shut it out was swept away and carried out of sight. It bore Roger Dunworth on the crest of its great waves. He could not resist its power; he felt no desire to resist it.

Presently she leaned back, and with her brush in one hand and her maul-stick in the other, she surveyed her work. Now Roger could see the beautiful profile of her face, those perfect outlines, that little mouth, the lips just parted by the interest she felt in the work she was doing, that delicately-tinted cheek, so smooth and tender to the touch as well he knew, that white throat above the blossom-colored ribbon—oh, for one look into those dark eyes now turned away from him! This woman was his love! By her own confession she was his love!

Roger stood still no longer, but walked straightway into the open space. Monaco, who had been sleeping in the sunlight, arose with a little growl, which ceased when he recognized a friend of the house. Ardis turned quickly. The appearance of any one would have surprised her; but now she was truly startled.

"Mr. Dunworth!" she exclaimed, and there was in her intonation a reproachful inquiry. Although her words did not ask him why he came there, her manner did.

Roger took no notice of her words or manner. He

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stepped near her and looked down into her face. "Ardis," said he.

Now a flush came into that beautiful face, and in an instant Ardis sprang to her feet. "Mr. Dunworth," she said, "you have no right to speak to me or to look at me in that way!"

"I have every right in the world," replied Roger.

Ardis now moved back a step or two. The flush left her cheeks and temples and became a bright light in her eyes. "Mr. Dunworth," she said, "you will oblige me by leaving me. I wish to be here alone."

Roger did not move from where he had been standing. His eyes were steadily fixed upon her. "I will not explain how I came here," he said. "It is not worth a word. Being here, I shall speak to you. Without regard to anything that I have done or anything that you have said, I will tell you that I love you with a love that cannot be set aside by anything that can come between earth and sky. I know that you love me; you have never told me that you did not love me——"

Ardis interrupted him. "Thank you," she said, speaking quickly. "That is a noble advantage to take of the frankness and honesty with which I spoke to you when we parted! If you did not comprehend my meaning then, I will tell you again that I will not hear the words you have spoken from a man who does not trust me. And now that you must understand me, will you go?"

"No," said Roger, "I will not go. Nothing you can say of what I have done, or of your reasons for judging me, can make me go. If you tell me that you do not love me, I will go."

"Is this manly?" said Ardis. "I am not strong enough to compel you to go; I can only ask you to do so."

"There is nothing strong enough to compel me to go,"

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replied Roger, "but the words which tell me that you do not love me. Can you say those words?"

The flush came again into the cheeks of Ardis. She made a step forward. "Roger Dunworth," she said, "is there nothing on earth that can make you leave me? Nothing that can make you respect my wishes, my rights?"

"There is nothing," said Roger, "but the words which tell me that you do not love me."

Ardis fixed her eyes upon him with a straightforward gaze. "You have no right to ask me to say those words," she said.

The sea in the soul of Roger Dunworth surged more wildly. His breast heaved. A great light came into his eyes. "Until you say them, I will never go!" he cried.

Ardis still looked at him steadily. "You will not go?" she said.

"No," was his firm answer.

"Then stay!" said Ardis.

Half an hour afterward Jack Surrey, at his post of observation, saw two persons come out of the woods and walk slowly across the open space to the house. One of them was Ardis Claverden; the other was Dunworth. In one hand he carried her canvas, and both her hands were clasped round his other arm; she looked up into his face and he looked down upon her; they knew not that any human eye was upon them, nor did they care. They walked on under the fair, blue sky, happier than all the world.

"By the Lord Harry!" said Surrey. And he took off his hat, and wiped his brow. He stood and watched the distant couple. "Did I do that?" he asked himself. Then, after a long gaze, he turned and got over the fence into the road. There he stopped, and again addressed himself. "Did the sight of me turn him into those woods?

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I believe it did! I truly believe it did!" He was almost past the gap when he stopped and turned. A grim smile showed itself under his moustache. "So much for that!" he said, and leisurely walked toward Prouter's house.

The proprietor of the establishment was standing in the open doorway clad in a white linen jacket, and placidly smoking a pipe. "Hi!" he cried, as Surrey came near. "Back early to-day! How does your piece come on?"

"It is finished," said Surrey.

"Turn out all right?" asked Prouter.

"That depends," said Surrey. "Some people may think it is all right, and others may have different opinions; but I imagine it is about as near right as such things generally are."

"They never are right," said Prouter. "What you read one day is knocked into a cocked hat by what comes along next day. The whole lot is a beastly nuisance."

Surrey smiled and seated himself in a wooden armchair which stood under a small sassafras tree near the house, the only shade-giving vegetation on the estate.

"Do you know," said Prouter, suddenly changing the subject to arboriculture, "that I have a mind to go right to work and plant my double row of trees from the house to the road? When it comes to that sort of thing the longer one waits the worse it is for him. You can build a house a great deal faster than you can make trees grow, and it stands to reason that you ought to give good odds to the trees. I'll make those fellows come out of the vineyard and dig the holes and plant the trees. By George! I'll begin this afternoon!"

"Do you know," said Surrey, "that Roger Dunworth is going to marry Miss Claverden?"

Tom Prouter stopped smoking. His mouth opened, and his face turned redder. "Who told you that?" he shouted.

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"Nobody," answered Surrey, "I speak from my own knowledge. They are the most devotedly attached lovers I ever saw—at least in the open air. If you had seen them, as I saw them to-day, walking across a field, you would not have needed any one to tell you that everything is all right now between those two. Yes, sir, they are to be married. There is no possible doubt of that."

Prouter now stepped out upon the very little porch in front of his house. He threw his pipe upon the ground, scattering sparks in every direction. He stamped his foot, he stretched out his right arm, he shook his clenched fist at Surrey. "I'll be hanged!" he exclaimed, "I'll be doubly hanged if you don't ruin everything within ten miles of you! You can't come into a place without making the very grass seeds rot in the ground before you. You're a blight! You're a plague! You are a curse-creeping pestilence!"

Surrey took out a cigar and proceeded to light it. "What's the matter now?" he said.

"Matter!" roared Prouter. "Anything but a stone-blind horse-post would see what is the matter! Every day since you have been here I have been intending to go over to see Miss Claverden, but I didn't want you hounding after me to Bald Hill, spoiling everything that you touched or looked at; and so I thought I'd keep away from there until you had gone. I was getting on vastly well with her till you came. And now, look at it! I am too late! There is no use going there at all!"

Surrey laughed aloud. "Tom Prouter," he said, "don't work yourself into a rage. Of course there is no use in your going to Bald Hill, if Miss Claverden is your object, and there never was, and there never could have been, any use in it. If you were the only man east of the Rocky Mountains she wouldn't marry you. And, what is more,

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I don't believe she would marry any man, east or west of the Rockies, if that man were not Roger Dunworth. I have not been sure of it all along, but I am quite positive now that the break between that worthy couple was not a snap-short. They were bound to come together again; and fellows like you and me had no better chances in that quarter than a couple of Chinese laundrymen."

Prouter did not immediately answer, but stood looking steadfastly at the other. "Do you believe you never had any chance?" he presently said.

"Never a ghost of one," answered Surrey.

Prouter's face now began to assume its ordinary color. "Now, really," said he, "you do believe that, do you?"

"Believe it?" said Surrey, "I am positively sure of it!"

Prouter came down the few steps of his porch, and picked up the wooden pipe he had thrown from him. He looked into its black depths for a moment; and then he turned abruptly to Surrey. "Look here," said he, "let's put some things in a bag, and go down in my trap to the lower end of the county and find that nigger sailor who can cook."

"Good!" said Surrey. "I am your man!"

The next morning the two started for the lower end of the county. When, after a devious journey, they arrived at their destination, they found that the negro in question had never been a sailor, and that he could not cook. They also discovered that a year before he had gone to Iowa with a party of negro emigrants.

On the evening of the day of their return, after a late supper, Prouter was walking contemplatively up and down the floor. "What are you going to do now?" he said to Surrey.

"Do?" said the other. "Nothing in particular."

"I thought you'd be likely to want to go away from here," said his host.

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"I have not the slightest idea in the world of going away," said Surrey. "When I first came I felt that the situation was a little awkward for me, but it is not in the least so now. I intend to stay here, and be as happy as I can. If you can keep me I should like it; and we can each throw in our money and make a pool for expenses. But if you don't fancy that, I can go somewhere else in the neighborhood. Now that this Bald Hill matter has been straightened out I feel free to go where I please."

"Oh, you can stay here, if you like," said Prouter; "that is, if I don't sell the beastly place. If I can't find anybody to buy it, I'll tell you what I have a mind to do. I am thinking of digging for petroleum on this place. I don't know that there is a chance of finding any, but one never knows about that sort of thing till be tries; and it will give those scoundrels in the vineyard something to do. It's of no use for them to work among those grape vines, and I have engaged them for a year. I should like to see them dig a hole so deep that they could never get out of it."

"I wouldn't throw up the vineyard like that," said Surrey. "Something may come of it."

"Come of it!" exclaimed Prouter, stopping suddenly in his walk. "I'll tell you what might come of it! If those lazy beasts should take to working instead of sleeping, and those stupid young vines should take to growing and having grapes on them, and those grapes should be like the grapes on that row of old vines on the top of the hill, and wine should be made of the grapes, there'd be nothing got out of the whole business but cramp-colic. You have tasted those grapes. Now, really, you wouldn't drink wine made from them, would you?"

"Not a drop of it," said Surrey. "Let's stick to whiskey and water."

And Prouter, going to the closet, brought out the bottle.

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CHAPTER XLVI.

"I TELL you, sir," said Major Claverden, standing with his back to the empty fireplace of his library, pipe in hand, and a shining joy on his ruddy countenance, "this is truly living! Now I feel as if my life were a success. Yes, sir, a success. I have had my disappointments and my losses. Disappointments and losses are perhaps yet before me. But what matters that, sir? Not a whit! I have had two great objects in life. One of them may come to nothing. Let it be so! The other is accomplished. My daughter will marry the man of her choice and of my choice; the man who, above all other men, is worthy of her. Now tell me, sir, can there be for a person of my age, for the father of a daughter like my daughter, a greater earthly joy than this?"

Doctor Lester was seated in a leathern arm-chair, not far from the major. As it was a fine moonlight evening he had walked over to Bald Hill, and had just been informed by the master of the house of the blessed event which had taken place that morning; the coming together again of Ardis and Roger. The doctor, too, held a pipe in his hand; he had lighted it, but it was now entirely out. He was evidently agitated, and for smoking purposes he had no breath at command. Who could help being agitated when told of such a happy event in a family of dear friends?

"It is true," he said, "very true. Nothing could be better than that."

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This he said to the major, and this he also said to himself. What could possibly be better than that?

The doctor had not yet seen Ardis. Roger had taken supper at Bald Hill, and he and Ardis had gone out for a walk.

"As to my other object in life," continued the major—"at least the object of my recent years—it is one on which my heart has been truly set. In endeavoring to produce that to which I would be willing to give the name of 'The Wine of Bald Hill,' I have most faithfully and earnestly worked. Success in this undertaking in producing a wine equal to that brought from the most celebrated vineyards of the Rhine would result in a gift to my family, and to the people of this portion of the State, which would be an honor to me, and an advantage and a glory to them. Do you not agree with me, sir?"

"Most certainly," said the doctor. "Nothing could be better."

"But," said the major, "I have strong reasons for believing that there never will be any wine of Bald Hill. The vines upon which I have lately depended for my success do not give satisfactory promise. They do not as nearly approach the mark at which I am aiming as some vines which several years ago I grubbed up and threw away. If in the autumn the grapes which these present vines produce—and it will be their first bearing—do not resemble in appearance and flavor the fruit of the Johannisburger vineyards, I shall absolutely and entirely relinquish my attempts in this direction. But what does it matter, sir? My daughter will marry Roger Dunworth. This is enough. I shall die content. Give me your hand, sir. The next best thing to this great happiness itself is the pleasure of speaking of it to a friend like you."

The doctor arose, and took the proffered hand. "Noth-

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ing could be better," he said. And then he bade his host good-night.

"What!" cried the major. "Will you not wait and congratulate Ardis? It is yet very early. Those lovers will return presently, I am sure."

But, in spite of the urgent entreaties of his host, the doctor persisted in his resolution to return. He was somewhat tired, and he would come the next day, or very soon, and congratulate Miss Ardis. As he shook the major's hand in parting, he said: "I am glad to see you so happy. And, truly, nothing could be better!"

All the way home—and he took a cross country route on which he would not be likely to meet anybody—Doctor Lester said to himself over and over again: "It is perfectly satisfactory. It is just what ought to have happened. It suits everybody. Nothing could be better." And even after he had got home and had gone to bed he continued to say these things to himself. He positively convinced himself over and over again that nothing could be better. In fact he made this conviction so strong that he did not sleep until the morning began to break.

It was two days after this that Ardis, riding on the high road, met Doctor Lester. She instantly brought Janet to a stop.

"Doctor," she exclaimed! "you are a recreant friend! I never should have supposed it possible that you would have allowed all this time to pass without coming to talk with me about what has happened; a thing in which you once took such a lively and generous interest. Have you not been well?"

The doctor answered that he had not been well. He had been intending to go to Bald Hill, and he was very sorry that he had not gone. He would be there very soon.

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But it surely was not necessary for him to tell Miss Ardis how happy he was in all that gave her happiness.

"Particularly in this one thing," she said. "I want everybody to be happier than they ever were before because I am going to marry Roger. And, by-the-way, doctor, why do you always walk nowadays? Is anything the matter with Cream-o'-Tartar?"

"Oh, no, no," the doctor answered quickly, "there is nothing at all the matter with him. I prefer to walk. It does me good."

Ardis shook her head. "I am not sure of that," she said. "I think you were better when you rode more."

And then, when she took her leave and was cantering away, she said to herself: "I must not forget his slippers. They must be finished by his birthday."

The work at the Dunworth farm—and there was always plenty of it—now began to add to itself branches which had not been seen there for many years. Everything in the way of surveying and inventories was stopped, and in the mind of the owner of the estate Northern Georgia faded away until it became like an unnoticed speck on the horizon. It had been settled that he and Ardis were to marry at the end of August, and his house was to be prepared for the reception of a mistress, the first it had had since the death of his mother when he was a little boy.

Paper-hanging, painting, carpenter work, lawn-renovating, and all that sort of thing, made the place lively and gave many subjects for evening conversation to Parchester, Skitt, and Cruppledean. Of late these three had been thrown a good deal upon their own resources for social pleasures. Since his return from the South, Dunworth had for the larger part of the time been occupied in his only spare moments with his schemes and plans for a change of residence; and since the day of his intrusion

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into a woodland studio he had spent every evening at Bald Hill.

Tom Prouter, too, had, in a measure, neglected his compatriots. He had, it is true, occasionally looked in upon them of a morning, but this was not very satisfactory to these students of husbandry; especially when they were at work at different places on the farm. They remembered with regret the jolly evenings they used to have with Prouter before that tiresome fellow with a big moustache came to stay with him.

"Now, really," said Skitt, one evening, as the three Englishmen sat on the piazza with their pipes, "I can't see any reason why Tom Prouter should stick so closely to that man. Do you?"

"No, I don't," said Parchester. "I see plenty of reasons why he should try to get away from him, but none why he should stick to him. I never saw anything like it! Tom is never really satisfied unless he has Surrey somewhere in sight."

"Do you know," said Cruppledean, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, and preparing to refill it, "I've been thinking lately that fellows oughtn't to be too hard on a fool, because it's about five to one he can't help it. If he gets himself shunted on a side-track he's got to go where the side-track goes."

"He ought not to get himself shunted," said Skitt. "He ought to keep on the main line."

"It's beastly easy to talk," said Cruppledean, "and I say let the fools go! If they get smashed up it's their affair! Other people can look out for themselves. I am going to look out for myself."

"How do you propose to do that?" asked Parchester.

"I am going to leave here," said Cruppledean. "It is all very well while we are independent, and can act like

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men; but when a petticoat gets into the house I say it is time to go."

"It depends a good deal," said Parchester quickly, "upon who wears the petticoat."

"Now hear him!" cried Skitt. "I'll wager a sovereign to a ha'penny that Parchester will want to stay here until he has learned all that anybody can teach him about Virginia farming; and, after that, he will want to stay on and learn how to disport himself as a husband and head of a family."

"You mean by that," said Cruppledean, "that he has been hit?"

"Hit!" replied Skitt. "Of course he has! She is like a Gatling gun; she hits all around."

"No she don't," said Cruppledean. "She didn't hit me."

"Look here!" said Parchester turning upon his companions. "You two may as well shut up on that subject. I am going to stay here because it always has suited me, and because I think it will suit me a great deal better when the house is kept in as good order as the farm is."

"Hear him!" cried Skitt. "How necessary is the refining influence of the sex to the happiness of the gentleman in cow-hide boots!"

"I don't mind saying," said Parchester, "that I go in for the sex. But, as I just now said, everything depends upon who wears the petticoat. Now, if Miss Airpenny were to be planted here as mistress of the house, I vow I would leave."

"You don't mean to say," cried Cruppledean, "that Dunworth ever had any idea of marrying Miss Airpenny?"

His companions burst out laughing. "Get away with you!" cried Skitt. "No wonder you never were hit! Your rhinoceros hide is so thick that you wouldn't know it if a dozen balls struck you!"

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CHAPTER XLVII.

IN these summer days Major Claverden, his daughter, and Roger Dunworth considered themselves the three happiest people in the world. They were happy because of the positive good which had come to them, and happier still because this good had come to them after they had convinced themselves that it was forever shut away from them.

Their friends were also happy; and many came to tell them so. It struck Jack Surrey that he should like to be one of these. But, after giving the matter a good deal of consideration, he concluded that if he had any idea whatever of settling in that part of the world, and wished to make friends of his neighbors, it would be well to allow the Claverdens and Dunworth the opportunity of making the first approaches to a renewal of acquaintance with him. They had done nothing of the kind so far; even the major, who once had seemed like an old friend to him, now appeared to be unaware of his presence in the county. Yes, he would wait and see what the changed conditions of things would bring about in regard to himself.

In the mean time there could be no possible harm in occasionally discussing the subject with mutual friends, and, with this purpose in view he, one evening, walked up to Heatherley to call on Miss Norma Cranton.

The first thing he did was to demand of that young lady a certain amount of gratitude for having obeyed her wishes by keeping aloof from Miss Claverden and Dunworth. "I do not know," he said, "that my turning my

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back on them had anything to do with what has happened. But I did turn my back; their engagement is renewed; everybody is satisfied; and even if I played a negative part in the matter I think I deserve some credit."

"Yes, negative credit," said Norma.

Surrey arose, walked to the window, took a look at the back yard, and then returned to Norma. "Miss Cranton," said he, "it strikes me that I am, really, a rather deserving sort of person. I came down here to serve my own purposes. Every man has a right to do that. I failed in those purposes. In fact I am willing to admit that I made a doleful mess of it. But all that being passed and gone, I think some attention should be given to the steadfast way in which I have kept out of the affair ever since."

"Well," said Norma, "that noble conduct may deserve some sort of recognition. What sort would you like?"

"I will tell you," said Surrey, quickly, "exactly what sort I would like. I would like that everybody in this neighborhood should totally, absolutely, utterly, entirely, and completely forget that I had ever anything to do with the Dunworth-Claverden combination, and that they should take me as I am; an honest-hearted man coming here with the notion of making this region his home; intending, it may be, to go into partnership with Prouter or somebody else; and desiring to be on good terms with the surrounding population. Now that isn't much to ask in the way of gratitude, is it?"

"No," said Norma. "I think I might manage to give you that much myself. But, really, Mr. Surrey, you must excuse me if I leave you for a few minutes. I see that a hen out there with a late brood of chickens has broken through the coop and she will lead her young family into all sorts of dangers. I must go and drive her back and get somebody to mend the coop."

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"Let me mend the coop!" cried Jack Surrey.

"You!" said Norma, with a laugh. "What does a city man know about hen coops?"

"I should be ashamed to come from a city," said Surrey, "where coop mending was not thoroughly taught."

In ten minutes after that Surrey, with hammer and nails which Norma had brought to him, had fastened the loose bars of the coop; and, together, he and Norma had slowly and warily driven the hen and her tender brood back to their quarters.

Ardis continued to work on her picture, and when it was finished, and not until then, she showed it to Roger. He was not a bad judge of pictures.

"I believe," he said, "that is the very best thing you have ever done."

"I am somewhat of that opinion myself," said she. "At any rate I am better satisfied with it than I generally am with my work. But there is something very odd about this picture. It is exactly the opposite of what it was intended to be. I had fixed upon a title for it. It was to be called: 'Without a Man.' But, as a man, without invitation or permission, forced himself in upon this lovely scene, I have let him stay and he has altered its whole purport. How do you like the figure?"

Roger steadfastly observed the man in the landscape. "I do not know," he said, "how I appear to the world, but I know very well how the world would appear to me if I had not appeared in that scene."

In spite of the busy condition of affairs at his farm Roger Dunworth found time to take frequent rides with Ardis. As they were cantering along an oak-shadowed road one pleasant afternoon they met Bonetti, also riding. Ardis instantly reined up Janet and the others also stopped.

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"Mr. Bonetti!" exclaimed Ardis. "I am so glad to see dear old Cream-o'-Tartar again! Why doesn't the doctor ride him now? Has he lent him to you?"

"The doctor doesn't happen to own him at present," said Bonetti. "He belongs, in fact, to me."

"To you?" exclaimed Ardis.

"Yes," said Bonetti, "I got him in trade from a man on the other side of Bolton."

"And how did the man beyond Bolton happen to have him?" asked Ardis, in a tone of excited interest.

"The doctor sold the horse to him some time ago. Let me see. It was just before he made that trip down to Georgia. I reckon he was a little short of cash about that time. It wasn't a bad piece of business," continued Bonetti. "The doctor got his money, and the man, having got the horse cheap, could afford to let me have him on an easy trade—days' work being a good part of it—and now I've got the horse. I really needed a horse, and it isn't every day you can make such a bargain for one."

"Mr. Bonetti," said Ardis after a moment's pause, "will you come to Bald Hill to-night? I want to see you on business."

"Certainly, certainly, Miss Ardis," said Bonetti, and then he took his leave.

"For the life of me," said Roger, as the two rode on, "I do not see how Doctor Lester ever brought himself to the point of selling that horse! For years the two have been the most constant friends. No matter how much he needed money I should have supposed he would have sold anything he possessed rather than old Cream-o'-Tartar!"

"Perhaps he had nothing else to sell," said Ardis. And there she let the subject drop.

Ardis was perfectly trustworthy when a friend told her

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a secret; she was equally trustworthy when she discovered the secret of a friend. She had not discovered the doctor's most important secret; but she had discovered that he had sold his horse to enable him to accompany her to Georgia.

The slippers for the doctor were never finished; but when his birthday arrived he received as a present his good old Cream-o'-Tartar.

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CHAPTER XLVIII.

ONE afternoon, about this time, Jack Surrey visited Heatherley. He had been there a great deal of late, on the general principle that, after Bald Hill, it was the pleasantest house in the neighborhood to visit. But now he went with a definite object. He was going to offer himself in marriage to Norma Cranton.

For some time he had had this matter in his mind, and he had lately convinced himself, with very little trouble, that to marry Miss Cranton would be a very good thing for him to do. Norma, in some respects, was an odd kind of young woman, but this oddity interested him. She was lively and good-humored, and had plenty of sound, practical sense. More than that, she was good-looking. Jack Surrey had not noticed that on his first acquaintance with her, but it had gradually dawned upon him. Her family connections and her domestic position suited him very well; and he thought, with considerable satisfaction, that a marriage with her would be a direct and immediate advantage to his own social position. At present this was, of course, unsatisfactory. A good many people, especially the Bald Hill people, did not appear to recognize the fact that he was residing in their midst; and as such a fact hitherto had been very generally recognized by people in whose midst he happened to be, the change appeared to him not only disadvantageous but disagreeable. As the son-in-law of the Cranton family, or even its prospective son-in-law, he might expect to be received everywhere.

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As Jack walked briskly toward Heatherley he was in very good spirits. He wore a light summer suit and a straw hat; and these became him, and he knew it. He was going to do a pleasant thing, and that pleased him. He had no notion that there could be any other issue to the business in hand than that he considered desirable. The love affair immediately preceding this one had indeed been full of difficulties; but that there should be any difficulties in the present case did not even occur to him.

When he reached the house he found there a party of aunts and cousins who had come to spend the day. Norma was in her glory. With the most hospitable intentions and with an unremitting flow of lively speech she was making her guests happy in body and mind.

Mr. Surrey was cordially welcomed, and presented to the company, on whom he made a very favorable impression. He was so bright and lively, and became acquainted with every one so easily and quickly, that there was a general expression of disapprobation when, after half an hour's visit, he rose to go. He declined the most pressing invitations to stay to dinner; but when he had taken his leave and had gone into the hall, he turned back to the parlor door and asked Miss Cranton if he might speak with her a moment.

"Certainly," said Norma; and as soon as she could finish what she was saying to her cousin, she followed him to the piazza.

"Now," said she to herself as she went out, "if he has come for advice about putting up fruit or vegetables I shall tell him that he and Mr. Prouter would better drop that thing at once. Men can't do that sort of housekeeping; they'd lose every cent they put in sugar and spices. Well, Mr. Surrey, what is it?"

"Miss Cranton," said Surrey, speaking in a low voice,

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"I came here to-day to tell you that I love you devotedly, and to ask to you to marry me."

If one of the oaks on the lawn had suddenly raised itself on the tips of its roots, and turned a summersault before her, Norma could not have been more thoroughly astounded. Her eyes opened to the widest, she held her breath.

"Now, not one word of reply, Miss Cranton, I beg of you," said Surrey. "I wish you to have time to think of what I have said. I will come to-morrow morning to hear your answer. Good-by."

Jack Surrey went away in a more cheerful mood than that in which he had come. "That is good business!" he said to himself. "I put in that shot sharp and deep. There was no dodging it, no warding it off. It was not the way I intended to do it, but I am not sure it was not better than any other way."

"Where are you going?" said Prouter to Surrey the next morning. "Really, it looks to me as if you were always going off by yourself, nowadays."

Surrey smiled. "The fact is," said he, "I have a little piece of business to attend to this morning. But after I get through with that I am at your service to do anything you like. What do you say to a coon hunt to-night? You have been promising me one ever since I have been here."

Prouter's eyes sparkled. "By George!" he cried, "we'll do it! Do you want the trap?"

"No, thank you," said Surrey, "I can easily walk where I am going."

"All right!" cried Prouter. "I'll harness up this minute, and go round the country and get together all the coon dogs I can find. I'll bring them home in the dog cart, and have them ready for to night."

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Surrey laughed. "I don't envy you your drive, with half a dozen curs, all strangers to each other, in the cart with you. But every man to his taste. Good luck to you!" And he left the house.

"Look here!" cried Prouter, suddenly springing to the door. "Are you thinking of investing in land?"

Surrey stopped. "I really can't say that that is what I am about to do," he answered.

"Very good," said Prouter. "Don't you do anything of that kind until you have had a talk with me. I may want to sell this shanty and colic-patch."

"I'll remember you," said Surrey; and he merrily went his way.

Norma Cranton did not immediately present herself in the parlor where Surrey awaited her; and when at last she appeared she carried a thin book in her hand, and on her face was an expression which seemed compounded of severity of moral principle, and an anxiousness resembling that frequently occasioned by jelly making. She did not appear to notice the hand which Surrey held out to her, and sat down in a chair near the door. Surrey stepped forward, gently closed the door, and seated himself near her.

"Miss Cranton," he said, "I have come to ask for an answer to what I said to you yesterday. I have come, too, to say a great deal more than I had an opportunity to say in those few moments. I have come to implore you to be my wife; to accept the warm, earnest love of——"

"A man who has had a good deal of practice in that sort of thing," said Norma, who under no circumstances restrained herself from her habit of finishing people's sentences for them. "But before you go any further, Mr. Surrey," she said, handing him the book which she

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opened at the pages between which her forefinger had been inserted, "I should like you to read that line." And she pointed to it.

"Poems?" said Surrey.

"Yes, poems," answered Norma. Surrey read:

"Once only Love, can Love's sweet song be sung."

He let the book drop on his knee and looked at her. "Do you know," said he, "that I think that is most unmitigated bosh!"

"I have a very different opinion," said Norma. "I think it is truth; the eternal truth of ages."

"It is eternal stuff and nonsense," said Surrey. "I know very well that this refers to my having been married before."

"You cannot have been married before," said Norma, "unless you marry again."

"That is what I want to do," said Surrey.

"It is what you ought not to think of," said she.

"My dear young lady," exclaimed Surrey, "I beg that you will banish that most perverting idea from your mind! It is true, I loved; I married. My wife died years ago. Again I loved."

"Yes," said Norma. "And that time Miss Claverden."

"I declare," said Surrey, "this is too bad! Do you intend to go back and probe up everything I have done in my whole life?"

"I would do so if I could," replied Norma. "I would mention the name of every woman you have been in love with."

"There are no more," said Surrey. "You have mentioned them all except yourself. Now I am perfectly willing to admit that I was in love with Miss Claverden. She declined to return my affection; and there was an

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end of it. My heart became perfectly free. I turned to you."

Norma closed the book, which he had handed back to her. "I have no suitable words," she said, "in which to express my dislike of that sort of grasshopper affection which skips from here to there whenever it pleases."

"Mine is not that kind," said Surrey, "and if it skips at all it skips from there to here. And here it shall stay, I vow, as long as you allow it!"

"I have never allowed it at all," said Norma.

Surrey made no answer to this remark. He gazed steadfastly at her. "Miss Cranton," he exclaimed, "that once only business is all wrong. But if you believe in it, let me love you once only—once for all—now and forever!"

At this moment there was a quick step on the piazza outside, and some one looked in through an open French window. It was Tom Prouter.

"Miss Cranton," he cried, "do you know if there are any coon dogs on this place?" And then perceiving Surrey, who had hastily pushed back his chair, he exclaimed in a vexed tone: "Did you come here after them? Now, really, it wasn't any use. You can't lead that sort of dog with a string or a chain. You've got to fetch them in a cart. I told you I'd attend to it."

Norma arose, very red in the face, but this was not noticed by Prouter, whose attention was now given to Surrey. "I don't know, Mr. Prouter," she said. "I will go and see if one of the men is about the house."

When she had left the room, Surrey turned to Prouter. "Do you know what you have done?" said he. "You have interrupted me at a most critical moment. I was proposing marriage to Miss Cranton."

Tom Prouter gave vent to a long ejaculation. "Do you call that fair and square?" he said.

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"Of course it is," said Surrey. "What is the matter with it?"

"I like that, you know!" said Prouter. "You seem to have forgotten what you said to me this morning. She wouldn't be willing to come to my place to live."

"Look here, Tom Prouter," said Surrey, hurriedly, "there is no time for any of that talk. This is my business, and it will not interfere in the least with yours. She may be back any minute, and I want you to get away as fast as you can. Now you go down to the barn and wait there until somebody comes to talk to you about the dogs; and don't come back to the house till I give you the word."

"How long do you suppose it will take you?" asked Prouter.

"Get away!" said Surrey. "I can't put a time and limit to that sort of thing. Trot now! Quick!"

Left to himself in the parlor, Surrey walked up and down the floor for a few minutes, but Norma did not return. Then he went out on the piazza and tramped up and down there for awhile. This was certainly very annoying. Of all the moments for a man to come in and inquire about coon dogs! He went down on the grass and walked nearly around the house looking up at the windows. But he saw no Norma. Returning to the front he ascended the steps of the piazza, and at the top he saw a bare-legged colored girl with a broom. She stood still and looked at him. She had never seen him before, and supposed that he had just arrived at the house.

"Where is Miss Cranton?" asked Surrey.

"Miss Norma?" said the girl. "Dunno. I reckon she up-stairs."

"Well go up and tell her—tell her a man wants to see her." Surrey perceived that he was a stranger to the girl, and thought this message politic.

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The girl departed and soon returned. "Miss Norma say she can't come down jus' now. Ef you'll tell me what you want I reckon she'd send you some sort o' word."

"What is she so busy about?" asked Surrey.

"Dunno 'zactly," answered the girl. "Reckon she got a piece o' glass in her eye."

"Glass in her eye?" exclaimed Surrey.

"Well, I s'pects it's glass," said the girl, "or p'raps it's a bit o' oat chaff, or a piece o' yarn. Anyway she swobbin' it like everything."

"Well, you go up and tell her," said Surrey, "that I can't wait and I can't send any message. I want her."

So the black messenger went up-stairs and informed Norma that the man down-stairs wanted her. "I reckon you better go down, an' sen' him off, Miss Norma," said the girl, "an' when you come back I'll help you git dat trash outer you eye. He look like one ob dem pussons dat neber *will* go 'way till dey see de mistis."

A few minutes afterward the girl informed the impatient Surrey that Miss Norma would be down presently.

Surrey went into the parlor and immediately closed the window opening upon the piazza, causing the girl to imagine that he was very much afraid of draughts. He walked up and down until the piazza had been swept and the sweeper had departed, very much to his relief; and, soon afterward, Norma entered the parlor, closing the door behind her.

If Surrey had not been told that she had been swabbing her face he would have known it from her appearance. Her color was more variegated than usual, and she had a troubled, uneasy expression, but without hesitation she advanced to him and spoke. Under any circumstances it was contrary to her nature to hesitate when she had anything to say.

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"Mr. Surrey," said she, "you sent me word that you wanted me, and I have come to tell you that there are other reasons why you cannot have me."

"Other reasons! What are they?" exclaimed Surrey, quickly.

"In the first place I can never leave my home. This home is part of me, and I am part of it. I could not tear myself from it nor could I tear myself from my father, nor from my family. In the second place it is plain you do not know me. I am a person accustomed to direct, to control. Everything in this house is managed by me. I like that. I cannot change my nature. It would be impossible for me to subject myself to the will of another. I cannot give up my independence."

"And these are your reasons!" exclaimed Surrey.

"Yes," said Norma.

Standing and looking down upon her, Jack Surrey felt that his liking for Norma had never been greater than at this moment. His impulse was to stop discussing the question, and to take her in his arms. But he restrained himself. He knew that if he lost his head he might lose the woman.

"My dear child," he exclaimed, "your reasons I blow to the winds! Be mine, and you need never leave this home unless you wish to. You shall always be its mistress, as you have been. You shall still care for your father and your family; and, better than ever, for I will help you. Nothing shall be changed except that I shall be with you, heart and soul, in everything."

She raised her eyes to him, but did not interrupt.

"And as to your management of affairs here, my precious Norma," he exclaimed, advancing a step nearer to her, "you should not have imagined that I could be so cruel, so blind to the interest of everybody as to even try to

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change that! Oh no, my dear love, my darling. Your hand shall ever be upon the helm. You it shall be who shall give the word of command. You shall order the sails flung to the winds, or furled from the storm. And you shall pipe all hands to holystone the deck; to board the enemy, or to muster aft for grog."

Norma raised her eyes again, and slightly smiled.

"Now all your reasons have vanished!" cried Surrey. "You are mine!"

He knew there was no further need for cautiousness, and he took her in his arms and gave her, with hearty earnestness, her first kiss from a lover. He was about to repeat the pleasing performance when she gently drew herself away.

"'Once only, Love,' she said. "Father is coming."

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CHAPTER XLIX.

THE engagement of Norma Cranton and Mr. Surrey surprised everybody. Most people disapproved of it, because as Norma Cranton had given her friends and neighbors reason to suppose that she did not intend to marry, this change of purpose was looked upon as a breach of faith; and as for Surrey, he was probably an adventurer. If she wanted a husband, it would have been much better for her to have taken some one in her own county who was known to herself and to her family.

But her family were very well satisfied. When Mr. Cranton found that Surrey was a man who could give a good account of himself; and, above all, that he was willing to come there and live with them and be one of them, he gave his full consent. If Norma must marry, this was the kind of husband she ought to have.

Ardis, when she was informed of the engagement—and Norma came to tell of it on the afternoon of the day on which it took place—was amazed and grieved. Doubts and fears rushed upon her mind; and her uppermost feeling for her friend was that of pity.

But when Norma with sparkling eyes and glowing cheeks had told her tale; had told how for some time she had had a drawing toward Jack; and how the difficulties which she thought in the way had all been blown to the wind; and what an honest, free-hearted fellow he was when one came to truly know him; and how they were to be married on Tuesday, the seventeenth of the present month, and then to go to Old Point Comfort for a fortnight, because

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that was so near that if anything happened at home she could be easily summoned; and that she honestly could say she was never so truly happy in all her days, Ardis breathed not one word of doubt, or fear, or pity. Norma was happy, and to her happiness Ardis gave her warmest and most loving sympathy.

"But there is one thing," she said, "which I do not understand at all. Tuesday, the seventeenth, is only two weeks from to-day. Why do you plan to be married so soon? You are wonderfully prompt in planning, anyway. Did Mr. Surrey name the day in his proposition?"

"No, he did not," said Norma. "I had as much to do with fixing the day as he had. The affair may look a little hasty; but Jack is like me. When a thing is to be done, he thinks the way to do it is to do it, and then it is done. I am to be married at home, without any stir, in a gray silk travelling dress, and that is all I shall have made at present. It will be a comfort to have it all over, especially as there is nobody but me to attend to the housekeeping; and I certainly ought to be back before the cucumbers are too big for pickling."

Ardis leaned back in her chair and laughed. "My dear child," she cried, "why didn't you plant gherkins, and then you might have made your wedding trip ever so much longer. They never grow big."

"Gherkins!" cried Norma. "I never plant gherkins! They can't get bigger than your finger, and how are you to know whether they are young and tender, or old and tough? But when regular cucumbers are little they are bound to be young. They are like human beings; a baby is a baby, and you can't make any mistake about it. But gherkins are like imps or dwarfs; little enough to be sure, but they may be as old as the hills."

And so it was that on Tuesday, the seventeenth day of

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the month, John Edward Surrey and Norma Witherspoon Cranton were married at Heatherley, with no one present but the family and a few near friends; that they went to Old Point Comfort; that after a merry fortnight there with the world and the sea, they returned to the quiet of Heatherley, and began their united existence.

And the honest-hearted Norma truly believed that the alacrity and promptness which characterized their matrimonial proceedings was due to her habits of prompt action. Never for a moment did she imagine that she was now a happy married woman because Jack Surrey was a man who, if he had anything to do, went immediately to work and did it.

"Everything is arranged perfectly," she said to Ardis on her return. "We settled it while we were away. I am to manage everything in our establishment just as I have been used to do; father is to do exactly as he pleases, and the others are to go on in the old ways; but Jack is to attend to all the buying and selling. Buying and selling have always been weak points in our family. We always sold when things were very cheap, and bought when they were very dear. Jack is going to change all that. I have no doubt that we shall be thousands of dollars richer."

The early days of August came, rich, warm, and fruity.

Then it was that Roger and Ardis were married. This wedding, too, took place in the family mansion of the bride; but it did not at all resemble the quiet ceremony at Heatherley. From all the surrounding country, and from cities afar, came wedding guests to Bald Hill. This was the grand culminating glory which had come to shed its refulgent light upon the life of Major Claverden; and he desired that all the world—at least all his world—should see that light; should bask and revel in it.

Not only invited guests, but negro men, women, and

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children with shining teeth and glittering eyes, came from all surrounding parts to lend a hand on this great occasion. To bask and revel in the effulgent light of a wedding at Bald Hill was a joy to them which would stand out boldly in the experience of a lifetime.

Two little darkies to a stick of wood for the great kitchen fire; three dancing colored girls to a pail of water; two women to pick the feathers from one chicken; three stout fellows to groom a horse, and a troop of between twenty or thirty men, women, and children to bring up watermelons from the distant patch, was about the proportion of laborers to labor in these happy days of preparation. Uncle Shad nearly broke himself down endeavoring to find them all something to do.

In the old mansion there was a rare scene when the beautiful daughter of the house walked through the parted crowd of wedding guests; and, still mistress of all hearts, gave herself away to one.

When the ceremony was over, the major stepped to the front and took command of the merrymaking. All made merry, but none made merrier than Jack Surrey. The occasion suited him perfectly. For the time he became, heart and soul, a Virginia gentleman of the olden time, and there were moments when it might have been difficult to determine whether it was he or Major Claverden who was the genial, glowing host.

When the last cork had been drawn at the wedding supper, when the last toast had been drunk, and the last speech made; when the last kiss had been given, and the last happy tear had been shed, Roger and Ardis drove away under the bright stars on their wedding journey to the North.

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CHAPTER L.

MR. EGBERT DALRYMPLE did not attend the wedding at Bald Hill. Shortly after his conversation with Major Claverden, in which the latter invited him to visit his house no more, he had gone away to stay away until it should please him to come back. During such absences it was his usual custom to go from place to place without giving notice to any one.

His family had grown accustomed to this and looked upon it as an eccentricity of genius. That Egbert was a genius not one of them doubted. In many respects this was a comforting conviction, for as it had always been impossible to induce him to act like other people, they satisfied their consciences in giving up the attempt by the reflection that there was a reason for his peculiarities. Genius they considered a very good reason.

The son of the house disturbed himself not at all about the opinions of the family, or the opinions of other people. In action he was absolutely independent. What he chose to do he did; and this might be said to be the rule of his life, if it had been compatible with his nature to make rules.

He had gone away from home because discordant notes had been struck within him—very discordant. When the murmur of this inharmony had ceased he would return. He belonged to Ardis Claverden. He had given himself to her, and there was no power on earth which could make him withdraw the gift. In the autumn he would return; and without reference to anything which had

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taken place he would again assure her of the eternal validity of her property in him.

Going from one summer resort to another he met many beautiful and charming women, and as he was as nearly beautiful as a man can be, some of these were attracted by him. This he perceived, but the knowledge made no impression upon him. If he occupied himself at all with thoughts of these ladies it was when, from a lofty height, he criticised their charms. This one was below his standard in one way; that one in another. One lady he condemned because she was too beautiful. She would make everything about her mean and ugly, he thought; she shone in herself, she gave out nothing. Not so the radiant one to whom he had given himself. Her loveliness was all-pervading. It filled his perceptions. It made it impossible for him to see aught but beauty in everything about her.

He was stopping in New York on his way from the seashore to the mountains, when, picking up a newspaper at his hotel, he saw therein an announcement of the marriage of Roger Dunworth and Ardis Claverden. He read it carefully; he read it again and then he laid the paper upon the table. He stood for few a moments gazing darkly upon the floor. Then he ejaculated: "So!" and strode from the room.

With his arms folded and his eyes fixed in sombre steadfastness on the ground before him, he strode a long distance, turning at random this corner or that. A flower-stand happening to come within the range of his downward glance, his eye was attracted by a blossom whose hue was in harmony with the season. Stopping, he bought the flower, and pinned it in his buttonhole.

It had been late in the afternoon when he read the announcement; and when it grew dark he was still striding.

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After a time he came out on one of the river fronts in a somewhat unfrequented part of the city. The streets and wharves were here not well-lighted, but there was a young moon, and its half-fledged radiance made up the deficiencies of lamp light. He went out on a pier, and stood with folded arms gazing darkly at the scene. The river stretched far before him to the green heights upon the other side. Below there were moving lights upon the water. Up the river all was calm and quiet.

Moored at a short distance beyond the end of the pier was a canal boat with no one visible upon it. Dalrymple much wished to get upon this boat. He disliked to have it between him and the view. But there was no plank connecting it with the pier, and the distance was too great to leap.

Dalrymple was full of youthful vigor and activity. He mounted with ease to the top of one of the tall posts at the end of the pier, and stood erect, with arms folded. This elevated position gave him a good view of the wide-spread and dimly-lighted scene; a scene in perfect harmony with his train of thought; for the young moon was going down the sky, and dusk was slowly giving place to night.

But the view was unsatisfactory to Egbert Dalrymple; the obtrusive and incongruous canal boat was between him and the far-reaching. He could not avoid seeing it in its ugliness, its inharmoniousness. He got down from the post and looked over the side of the pier. Under the next pier he saw a network of beams and cross-pieces which had for him an odd attraction. He knew there must be the same beneath the pier on which he stood; and he let himself down nearly to the surface of the water and got upon the supporting frame-work. Holding to some of these timbers, and stepping upon others,

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he moved slowly under the pier. The light was very dim and occasionally he stretched out one foot before him in order to feel his way, and after a slight slip while doing this, his foot accidentally rested upon a large, horizontal beam, a little below the surface of the water. This discovery fascinated him. His eyes were becoming accustomed to the dim light, and he could discern the timbers about him. But this one could not be seen; it was an unknown foothold.

Moving his foot along this submerged beam, he found that it extended itself toward the outer end of the pier; how far it extended he could not know, but that mattered nothing. He stepped boldly upon the beam and, as here there was space enough, he stood upright. Then, thrusting his hands into his trousers' pockets, he walked steadily forward, the water lapping about his ankles.

It pleased him well that he could not see the beam on which he walked. He would come to the end of it without knowing he was there. This would be in consonance with his mood.

He came to the end without knowing he was there. "So!" he ejaculated; and thrusting his hands still deeper into his pockets, he disappeared beneath the water.

There was no one on the canal boat but the wife of the captain, and as she did not expect her husband until a late hour she fastened the door of the little cabin and went to bed early. She slept well, but she had a curious dream. She dreamed that somebody without a boat, or a plank, or a bridge of any kind, came out to the canal boat, and knocked for admission. And, strangest of all, this person did not knock on the door of her cabin, nor on the deck, nor on the sides, nor at the bow nor the stern, but actually knocked on the bottom of the boat.

When, after midnight, her husband came on board in a

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skiff, she told him her dream. He was in a jovial mood and laughed.

"That's just where I want people to knock," said he, "who come about this boat when I am away. I fancy you didn't git up an' let him in?"

The woman smiled, but the influence of the dream was upon her, and she lay awake for a long time.

The tide was running out, and from under the canal boat the flower of late summer, the blossom in harmony with the season, floated away under the quiet waters into the open bay, and beneath the vessels great and small, on and on, urged by the strong current, out to sea. And there, floating in still water far below the long-rolling surface swell it passed beneath a coastwise steamer coming northward, on whose deck stood a newly-wedded couple on their bridal tour. They had come on deck to see the sun rise.

Farther out to sea, and farther out, and deeper down, and deeper down, sank the flower of late summer, until it faded away into unknown depths, where no particle of light could penetrate to show that it had ever been a flower.

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CHAPTER LI.

IT was early in September, Ardis and Roger had returned from their wedding tour, and at the earnest solicitude of Major Claverden were spending a few days at Bald Hill before settling in their new home. Not a cloud obscured their perfect happiness. They returned to hear nothing but that which was cheerful and hopeful.

At Heatherley, Norma was full of work and happiness. Delighted with the conviction that, as a married woman, she was managing better than ever before, she did not perceive that Jack Surrey's hand was ever on the helm; that he it was who gave the word of command; that he ordered the sails flung to the winds or furled from the storm; and that he piped all hands to holystone the deck, to board the enemy, or to muster aft for grog.

Doctor Lester was looking better. His eyes were brighter, and the old smile was more frequently seen on his face. He had accepted two things; the Inevitable and Cream-o'-Tartar, and both had done him good. He was fond of walking, but he did not like to be obliged to walk, it humbled him. It was cheering to his soul again to ride about on his good old friend, and wherever he went, to meet other good friends glad to see him.

One thing he had lost, or rather had deliberately set aside, and that was the old friendship and intimacy with his brother philosophizer, Bonetti. The doctor was always civil to the descendant of the wine dresser, but there was no more philosophizing; there were no more confi-

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dences. Bonnet had been false to him. Bonnet was set aside.

The three English pupils of husbandry still remained at the Dunworth place, awaiting the advent of the new *régime*. Parchester was there because it was the wish of his heart to live where he could serve the mistress who was coming; Skitt was there because he wanted to see how things were going to turn out; and Cruppledean remained because it was stupid to go off by one's self, and because he supposed one place was as bad as another.

Tom Prouter was in a state of spasmodic satisfaction. This had been the case for a few days only. For some weeks before he had been in a very dull mood. He had lost interest in his vineyard. Surrey had deserted him; and there had been another cloud of which he did not speak. But now his spirits were brightening. He had sold his place, and Miss Airpenny had bought it.

This sturdy and worthy lady was about to set off on a long series of journeys into far-away lands, and it had occurred to her, when Prouter's little estate was put into the market at a very low figure, that it would be a satisfactory thing to have a home to come back to and a place to which to send such articles of oddity or art as she might collect in her wanderings. So she bought the property, vineyard and all, and engaged Bonetti to come there with his family and take charge while she was away, and to devote his services to her when she should return.

This was rare good fortune to Bonetti. Here would be opportunities, such as before he had never had for enjoying what the seasons might give him of warm air, blue sky, and the smell of grapes.

It was matter for conjecture, when Bonetti had settled his family in the small house vacated by Prouter, whether or not Miss Airpenny, after her return from her travels

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would be able to find any place for herself and her belongings. But the ingenious Bonetti easily solved this problem by showing what a simple matter it would be to build a wing on one side of the house. There was space enough to make the rooms any size Miss Airpenny might think she required.

One regret only clouded the soul of Bonetti, and that was that Doctor Lester was no longer his friend, confidant, and benefactor. But philosophizing is often a great comfort; and as Bonetti smoked his evening pipe on the little porch of his new home, he more than once said to himself that, after all, it was very well that things had happened as they had happened. For if he had not sold that little piece of information to Prouter he and Surrey would never have gone to Georgia; there would have been no row down there; Miss Ardis would have returned to Bald Hill engaged to Dunworth; the madcap Prouter would never have thought of settling down and buying that house and vineyard; if he had not bought it he could not have sold it to Miss Airpenny; if Miss Airpenny had not become its owner, he, Joseph Bonetti, would not now be smoking his evening pipe upon that porch.

The fact that no one knew anything of the whereabouts of Egbert Dalrymple caused no sensation in his family nor among his acquaintances. It was so much of a custom with him to go away when he pleased, to stay away as long as he pleased, and to write to no one unless it happened to please him to do so, that his continued absence was considered quite a matter of course. He had a small income of his own, and it was not necessary for him to communicate with his family.

His sister had her private ideas about him. "This time," she said to herself, "it is all on account of that Claverden girl. He will not come back here until he has

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set his heart on somebody else. If he should write to me from Japan, I should not be surprised."

As nobody knew where he had gone, nobody knew that he would not come back. The only connection between what he had been and what he was, was the vague dream of the wife of the canal-boat captain—a dream belonging as much to another world as to this.

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CHAPTER LII.

It was the last evening of the stay of Roger and Ardis at Bald Hill. On the morrow they would begin life in their own home. The air was slightly cool, and a wood fire was crackling in the library, where a goodly company of friends were assembled. The Chiverleys were there; they had come down to the wedding, and had been detained by the major as prisoners of hospitality. Doctor Lester was there; and Mr. and Mrs. Surrey had driven down from Heatherley in the old family coach, which had recently been painted and put in running order. Ex-Governor Upton and General Tredner had arrived that day, having come down to Bald Hill to keep the major from feeling lonely after his daughter had gone. They were always willing to employ a spare week or two in good works of this sort.

The major had invited the three English pupils, but when they heard that Miss Airpenny was to be there. Skitt and Cruppledean declined; and Tom Prouter drove Parchester to Bald Hill in his cart.

"Do you know what I should like to do?" said Prouter, when they were on the road.

"No, really," said Parchester. "It is too much to expect of any man to know what you would like to do!"

"Then I'll tell you," said Prouter, with an expression of high moral conviction. "It is beastly stupid for me to try to manage things I know nothing about. I made an ass of myself in the milk business, and vine-growing was no better. Before I start out to do anything else I ought

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to know how to do it. What do you say to my asking Dunworth to take me as a pupil?"

Parchester gave a sudden twist in his seat, and looked very hard at his companion. "Tom Prouter," said he, "where did you tell me your people live at home?"

"At Fligwich, Bucks," was the reply.

"Well then," said Parchester, "what I advise you to do is to go back to Fligwich as soon as you can."

"Fligwich be blowed!" said Prouter, as he gave his horse such a crack that Parchester nearly went backward out of the cart. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll go to California and travel about there for a time, and if I find, when I come back, that I haven't got over wanting to learn farming of Dunworth, then I'll go to Fligwich."

The library was the largest and pleasantest room at Bald Hill; and never had it held a more genial company. Late in the evening the major absented himself for a few minutes, and when he returned he bore in his hand a bottle of wine. He advanced into the middle of the room, and put the bottle upon a table.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I will ask you to give me your attention for a very short time. You all know that for years I have devoted myself to an object which gradually grew to be very precious to me. That object was to produce on my native soil, on the very land on which I was born, on which I have lived, and on which I shall die, a wine as rich, as generous, I may say of as noble qualities, as that which is made from the most famed vineyards of the Rhine; in which vineyards there are no elements of success in grape culture which do not exist on my own Bald Hill. This I believe. And this I still believe.

"But I have not been able to attain my object. Through my own fault I have been unable to attain

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it. In many ways I erred, but I shall not dwell upon these. One of my greatest faults was the eagerness of age. I ought to have been a young man when I began this work, for I was handicappped by the feeling that what I had to do must be done quickly. I was too unwilling to wait patiently for results. Of this I will presently give you proof.

"Four years ago some of my vines, to which I had given great care, yielded promising fruit from which a small quantity of wine was made. This wine, even after the lapse of two years, did not come up to my standard of wine of that age. This disappointment led me to dig up the vines. Of the wine that was made, only this bottle was preserved. A day or two ago, more from curiosity than any other motive, I tasted it, and I say to you, my dear friends, that I believe I have here the true wine of Bald Hill, equal to any wine ever made on the slopes of the Rhine or on the smiling shores of the Mediterranean."

This announcement made a great stir in the eagerly listening company; but no one interrupted the major, and he went on.

"But I have failed in my great object of the production of this wine on my native soil. The vines from which this was made are gone. I cannot tell any one, for I do not know, myself, under what conditions I grew them. It is too late for me to begin again that protracted series of experiments. There is in the world but this one bottle of my wine of Bald Hill; and there will never be any more of it.

"But I do not consider that my life has been a failure. I have lived to see my daughter happy. That is enough for me. And now, good friends, to the health and happiness of that daughter let us drink the wine of Bald Hill."

A tray of small glasses was brought, and the major care-

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fully portioned the precious wine among the company. The toast was drank with friendly enthusiasm. Then followed a burst of encomiums upon the aroma and flavor of the wine which the company continued to sip with increasing delight as long as a drop remained. But it was impossible that the general gratification should not be mingled with feelings of regret that the Wine of Bald Hill was a thing of the past. The major, however, declined all condolences. He had had success enough in life; he could spare this one.

Suddenly, and to the surprise of every one, Doctor Lester rose to his feet with the evident intention of addressing the company. Such action was so foreign to the ordinary habits of this quiet and retiring gentleman that every one stopped talking, and every eye was fixed upon him. Unaccustomed as he was to addressing even the smallest assembly, he did not, on this occasion, hesitate, nor show the slightest discomposure. Either the potent spirit of the rich wine, or the concentrated emotions of a lifetime affected him. He spoke with strength and earnestness.

"My friends," he said, "do not commiserate Major Claverden. He has nothing to regret. He has not failed. The true 'Wine of Bald Hill' is a thing of reality. It exists. Noble, generous, and rare, it flows in the veins of his daughter Ardis."

A round of applause broke from the company as the doctor sat down; and, without a word, Major Claverden warmly grasped him by the hand. A moment afterward Ardis stepped quickly to the doctor's side, and, stooping, kissed him.

THE END.

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